Thursday, May 14, 2009 ★★ 6 sections / Vol. 24 / No. 135 P18 www.inquirer.net

A peek into Pacquiao's 4-bedroom house in LA's 'old rich' enclave **LIFESTYLE** / C2

SMC in Meralco may only create trouble, says worried Lopez patriarch **BUSINESS** / B1

Sulu governor survives bomb attack; 6 hurt **ACROSS** / A14

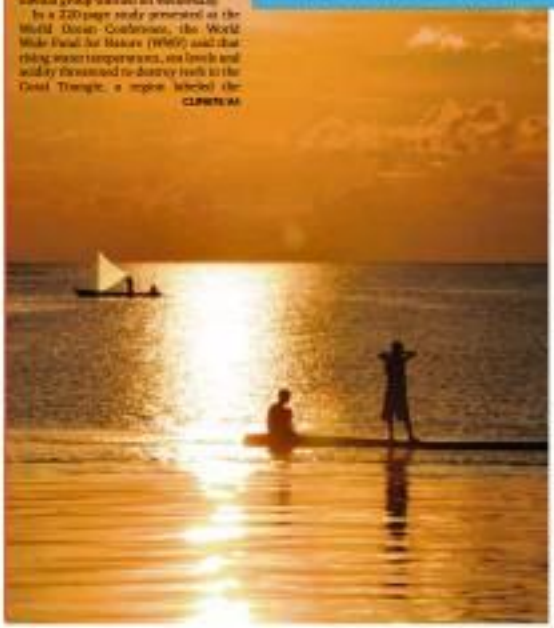
PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Climate change threatens 100M in Southeast Asia

MANADO, INDONESIA—AROUND 100 million people risk losing homes and livelihoods unless drastic steps are taken to protect Southeast Asia's biologically diverse coral reefs that could be wiped out in coming decades because of climate change, an international environmental group warned on Wednesday.

In a 220-page study presented at the World Ocean Conference, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) said that rising water temperatures, sea levels and acidity threatened to destroy reefs in the Coral Triangle, a region labeled the

CLIMATE/A4



GOLDEN SPLASH Fishermen set out to sea toward the setting sun in Sulawesi waters off eastern Indonesia where ministers and officials from 70 nations are meeting in Manado City North Sulawesi, for the five-day World Ocean Conference and Coral Triangle Initiative Summit, which sets the stage for the climate change talks in December. AP

And then there are six ... to speak for GMA

By Christian V. Esguerra

BUT HOW MANY MOUTHpieces does a leader actually need?

President Macapagal-Arroyo has appointed

AND THEN AS

Erap warns of trouble if Cha-cha on

'GMA bid talk of Pampanga'

By Allison W. Lopez and TJ Burgonio

FORMER PRESIDENT Joseph Estrada yesterday warned that "there could be trouble" if the administration and its allies succeed in pushing through with Charter change before 2010.

"I am afraid the masses will not allow it," Estrada said in a statement, referring to a nationwide plebiscite that must be held to ratify whatever constitutional amendments would be proposed by a constituent assembly.

The purported plan of President Macapagal-Arroyo to again seek a government post has long been an "open secret" in her home province of Pampanga, the United Opposition (UNO) claimed yesterday in reaction to reports that she may run for prime minister once the Constitution is amended.

Makati Mayor and UNO president Jejomar Binay said La Union Rep. Victor Ortega's statement to the Inquirer on Tuesday that Ms Arroyo may run for the parliamentary post merely confirmed the rumors making the rounds in Pampanga.

"During my recent visit to Pampanga, everyone I talked to—from government officials to the tricycle driver—are preparing for Ms Arroyo's candidacy in 2010," Binay said in a statement.

"They are not really sure if it's for Congress or for parliament, but they are sure she will run," he said.

Estrada said that "the people want administration change, but not con-

ERAP WARNS/A4

HOW SWEET IT IS Sen. Manny Villar leaves Sen. Pia Cayetano at the Senate session hall on Wednesday. Today, he faces a grilling by the Senate committee of the whole on an ethics case filed by Sen. Jamby Madrigal (behind). (Story on Page A2.) JOVEN CAGA

SCIENTIST'S 'WILD IDEA'

Human error cause of A(H1N1) probed

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANization (WHO) is investigating a claim by an Australian researcher that the swine flu virus circling the globe may have been created as a result of human error.

Adrian Gibbs, 75, who collaborated on research that led to the development of Roche Holding AG's Tamiflu drug, said in an interview that he intended to publish a report suggesting the new strain may have accidentally evolved in eggs that scientists used to grow viruses and drug makers used to make vaccines.

"One of the simplest explanations is that it's a laboratory escape," Gibbs said in an interview with Bloomberg Television on Wednesday. "But there are lots of others."

The disclosure came yesterday as China and Hong Kong respectively confirmed their second cases of swine flu. The A(H1N1) virus has killed 81 people worldwide.

Gibbs said he came to his conclusion as part of an effort to trace the virus' origins by analyzing its genetic blueprint.

The WHO received GIBB's study last weekend and was reviewing it, Reiji Yoshida, the agency's assistant director general of health security and environment, Gibbs said in an

HUMAN/A4

WHO official in abuse rap hospitalized

By Terra Quiamanda and Allison W. Lopez

THE AUSTRALIAN DOCTOR accused of molesting a Filipino child in his care is under guard at the Philippine National Police General Hospital, having been taken there complaining of chills and dizziness early yesterday.

The purported molester, a Manila-based official of the World Health Organization (WHO), was brought to the hospital's emergency room at around 3:40 a.m., according to a police report.

The Inquirer will no longer use the names of the purported

MOLESTER/A4

Querubin takes 1st step in Senate run

By Vincent Cabreza
in Bacoor, Cavite
and Jocelyn R. Uy
in Manila

DISGRACED COL. ARIEL QUERUBIN yesterday took the first step toward his bid for a Senate post in next year's elections, registering in a voter-hugging mothers and kissing babies.

The beret-clad Marine officer facing rebellion charges got a "daylight pass" from his cell at Camp Aguinaldo until at 4 a.m. was driven for the five-hour trip to Bacoor, Cavite, with four military escorts.

It took the 50-year-old Querubin 45 minutes to register at Barangay Anao, after which

QUERUBIN/A4

TASTE OF FREEDOM Detained Marine Col. Ariel Querubin gets a pass to register as voter in Bacoor, La Union, lunch with classmates supporting his run for the Senate, and be with his son.

Comelec reconsiders 4 bidders

By Jeremee Awing, Christine O. Avendaño and Michael Lim Ubac

IT'S BACK TO SQUARE ONE FOR THE P13.3-billion project of the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to fully automate next year's elections after it earlier raised the possibility of partial automation that sparked condemnation in the Senate.

The Comelec's Special Bids and Awards Committee (SBAC) announced last night that it had decided to grant the motions for reconsideration of four bidders, rejecting three others.

"The poll automation program is right on track," said SBAC chair Ferdinand Rahmas. "But the bidding process is not yet finished and we will now see which one of them will pass."

In a 15-page ruling, the SBAC granted the motions for reconsideration by Indra Sistemas (Strategic Holdings, Inc./Hart Intercivic); Smartmatic/To-

COMELEC/A4

'Ex-general used ₱40M in Balikatan funds'

By Jocelyn R. Uy

A PHILIPPINE NAVY JUNIOR OFFICER has blown the whistle on a retired general and other military officers for allegedly pocketing over ₱40 million in US funds for joint military exercises in 2007 and is getting hit by a ton of brickbats.

Navy Lt. Nancy Gadian told reporters in a phone interview yesterday that retired Lt. Gen. Eugenio Cedo, as chief of the Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom), used the matching BALIKATAN exercises two years ago in Jolo, Sulu, as a "milking cow."

Gadian, who filed her resignation last month, claimed that of the ₱46 million provided by the Americans, only ₱12.3 million was released to Filipino troops.

"We are more than willing to provide the Senate with documents, including the results of their planning exercises," said Gadian, who was then assistant chief of staff of Westmincom's civil military operations.

She also said other high-ranking officers were involved, but she would only reveal their names "at the proper forum."

In an interview over radio station dyRH, Cedo laughed off Gadian's allegations, saying that the junior officer

EX-GENERAL/A4

WEATHER FORECAST

TODAY: Cashiers, pm. Visayas and Mindanao will experience mostly cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers and thunderstorms. The rest of the country will have partly cloudy skies with isolated rain showers in the afternoon or evening.

Metro Manila	Partly Cloudy	Tuguegarao	Mostly Cloudy
Baguio	Partly Cloudy	Tacloban	Mostly Cloudy
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	Cebu	Mostly Cloudy
Iloilo	Partly Cloudy	Catarman	Mostly Cloudy
Puerto Princesa	Partly Cloudy	Gen. Santos	Mostly Cloudy
Legazpi	Mostly Cloudy	Zamboanga	Mostly Cloudy
Virac	Mostly Cloudy	Cagayan de Oro	Mostly Cloudy
Dagupan	Mostly Cloudy	Davao	Mostly Cloudy

Weather forecast issued by: Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration

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No stopping probe of Villar

By Christine Avendaño

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile said he will not stand for any more delays in hearing the ethics case filed by Sen. Jamby Madrigal against Sen. Manuel Villar and will begin today the preliminary inquiry into the charges by the Senate acting as a committee of the whole.

"The only way they (the minority allied with Villar) can stop the preliminary inquiry is to go court and get an injunction," he said.

Enrile said it was "very obvious" that the minority bloc—which said the inquiry cannot go on today as scheduled as the group intended to ask for yet more amendments to the rules—was delaying the proceedings.

"All my life I have been a lawyer and was trained in the courtrooms. I know when proposals are not intended for delay and when they are intended for delay and I'm going to round my ground even to the point of being accused if they have the audacity to do it, long enough to enough," Enrile told reporters.

At the preliminary inquiry, the senators will look at the evidence submitted by Madrigal to prove her allegations that Villar used his position as Senate President to push the double tracking and connecting of the P200 million C5 road extension project so as to benefit his real estate business.

Fair treatment

If they find the evidence to be "credible and substantial," they will proceed with the investigation of Villar.

Enrile said Villar may or may not attend today's hearing.

He, however, expressed confidence that the senator will be given fair treatment by the committee.

"I'm not clinging to my job as Senate President or chairman of the committee of the whole, that I have to do my duty as presiding officer," Enrile said.

"He cannot go on and on in a debate," he said.

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. said the other day he was acting as a committee of the whole (never presented with the preliminary inquiry) as not to let the minority plan to seek more amendments to the rules but the amended rules have yet to be published in accordance with the law.

Pimentel said if the majority bloc pushes ahead with the preliminary inquiry, the minority will have to resort to the means available to them, including going to the Supreme Court.

DOUBLE STANDARD?

Quorum lack stalls case vs Gordon

By Michael Lim Ubac

THE SENATE COMMITTEE on ethics yesterday cancelled the hearing on the complaint lodged against Sen. Richard Gordon for alleged impropriety for accepting the post of chair and chief executive officer of the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC).

The committee said lack of quorum had prompted the cancellation of the hearing originally set for 1 p.m. It was later reset to 2 p.m. but had to be eventually cancelled when no senator turned up.

The minority bloc asked why the majority could not muster a quorum for the committee of the whole, which is investigating Sen. Manuel Villar on the C-5 road extension project, while there was an apparent lack of interest in ethics cases involving a senator with the majority.

Since his career as Senate president in November 2008, Villar now belongs to the administration minority.

Former Quezon City Rep. Jaime Lihan has accused Gordon, a member of the majority and ethics committee, of violating the anti-graft and corrupt practices act by chairing the Red Cross while serving as senator at the same time since 2006.

Seizing the opportunity, Sen. Alan Peter Cayetano, Villar's confidant, noted that of the hearings on Villar's case, which are set twice a week, are still attended by the majority.

"The other committee—whether conducting an investigation or hearing on administrative matter—is attended twice a week. But when it comes to other ethics cases, either they are not scheduled or there is no quorum," Cayetano pointed out.

Cayetano said this bolstered his claim that Villar's case is not about justice. "It is about assuming trial by publicity and the ethics committee using the committee of the whole as a venue for political mudslinging," he stressed.

Gordon has branded Lihan's complaint as politically motivated.

Red Cross is a voluntary and independent organization. Under the law, every Filipino dedicated to serving with dignity and hence his fellow human beings should be a member of the Red Cross," the senator said, referring to Republic Act No. 95.

In 2006, Lihan was expelled as chair of PNRC Quezon City Chapter for allegedly failing to account for about P30 million of Red Cross funds.

Go green, bets told

AN ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP YESTERDAY challenged political parties and candidates to adopt environmental responsibility in their platforms in the run up to the 2010 elections.

The EcoWaste Coalition also called on candidates to conduct their campaigns in an environment-friendly manner.

"They can start by reducing the trash from campaign products," Manny Calonzo, president of the coalition, told the Inquirer yesterday.

The calls were made in yesterday's launching of the group's "Zero Waste 2010 Elections" in a simple ceremony held outside the headquarters of the Comelec in Intramuros, Manila. Alexis Papa

'Chemo' for Legacy owner

CELSO DE LOS ANGELES, THE founder of the collapsed Legacy Group who is feared to be suffering from cancer of the tonsils, will undergo chemotherapy and radiation starting this week, according to his lawyer.

"They are hoping the therapy will reduce the tumor and improve his chances of survival when he decides to be operated on," said lawyer Noel Mahaya.

Marilou Lagonoy, St. Luke's vice-president for communications, confirmed that De los Angeles would undergo chemotherapy and radiation soon.

He said De los Angeles was still confined at the St. Luke's Medical Center in Quezon City.

Mahaya said that De los Angeles' cancer is an advanced state, "stage 4."

He described his client's mood as "like a roller coaster" because of his apprehensions about a surgery where his chance of survival is considered to be very slim.

"If he goes under the knife, he was told the survival rate is only 30 percent," Mahaya said.

De los Angeles is unable to talk and communicate by scribbling on a "magic slate," the lawyer said.

"He is being fed through a tube directly to his stomach, instead of the tube on his throat before," he said.

The lawyer also said that De los Angeles has been informed about the death from cancer last week of Jesse Martinez, the Security and Exchange Commissioner who was linked to the Legacy scandal.

Mahaya said that despite his ill-ness, De los Angeles said he would like to continue his legal battles.

"He cannot rest his hopes on, and that when he was already a mayor he no longer called the shots [at Legacy] ...and that it was the two top officials [who were] operating the company," Mahaya said.

The lawyer also said De Los Angeles' siblings, a brother and sister who are both doctors, had flown in from the United States and are taking care of him.

De los Angeles, who is the mayor of Santa Domingo, Albay, is facing multiple charges of syndicated estafa and securities fraud brought against him by private investors, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas and the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corp. (PDIC) for the fraudulent schemes that he allegedly perpetrated in the shuttered Legacy banks and pre-need firms.

Nancy Carvajal

10,000 hired in Labor Day job fair

THE PATTONVILLE GOVERNMENT-sponsored job fair on May 1 resulted in the hiring on the spot of about 10,000 jobseekers, the Department of Labor and Employment said yesterday.

Labor Secretary Marianito Roque said the fair, dubbed "Sabayang Oryentasyon 09" also referred 36,442 job seekers for employment to participating firms that offered highly in-demand jobs.

Such in-demand jobs include those in business processing, outsourcing, information technology services, wholesale and retail, construction, food and beverage, hotels and restaurants, and manufacturing.

Jeannette Andrade

Ninoy convicts want pardon made absolute

THE 12 PARDONED CONVICTS IN THE Aquino-Galman double murder case want the executive clemency granted them to be upgraded to absolute pardon.

"We are seeking an absolute pardon so they can have their terminal benefits [from the military service]. And perhaps they can be employed in government if there are jobs that may be available," Chief Public Attorney Dyrnida Acosta said in a telephone interview.

In a letter to Bureau of Pardons and Parole executive director Reynaldo Dayang, whose recommendation to President Macapagal-Arroyo they are seeking, they said they want to live and work again like ordinary citizens.

Those seeking absolute pardon are Master Sgt. Pablo Martinez, Sergeants Arnulfo Arcamo, Ruben Aquino, Rolando de Guzman, Rodolfo Dowling, Arnulfo de Mesa, Ernesto Mateo, Felicisimo Miranda, Rogelio Sheron, and Wilfredo Tavas; Technical Sgt. Claro Lat; 1st Lt. Jesus Castro; and Capt. Romeo Baniqued.

"We are seeking that their civil and political rights are restored, that they may be allowed to vote and be voted upon," Acosta added.

An absolute pardon will enable the soldiers to vote, claim their retirement benefits as members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, be able to work, acquire property under their name, among others.

But Sen. Benigno S. "Noynoy" Aquino III, son of the assassinated opposition leader, questioned the motive of the soldiers for seeking absolute pardon.

"For what are they seeking absolute pardon for? Don't they want the records to heal already? Do they want positions in government? Will they run in the next elections? Is that the next chapter of this crusade?" Noynoy said.

Noynoy said that jurisprudence states that absolute pardon does not restore public positions previously held by the pardonee nor does it give the pardonee the right to back wages. Norman Bordadora and Tonette Torres, Inquirer.net

Erap asks court to lift hold order

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

FORMER PRESIDENT JOSEPH ESTRADA yesterday asked the Sandiganbayan to lift the hold departure order issued against him eight years ago.

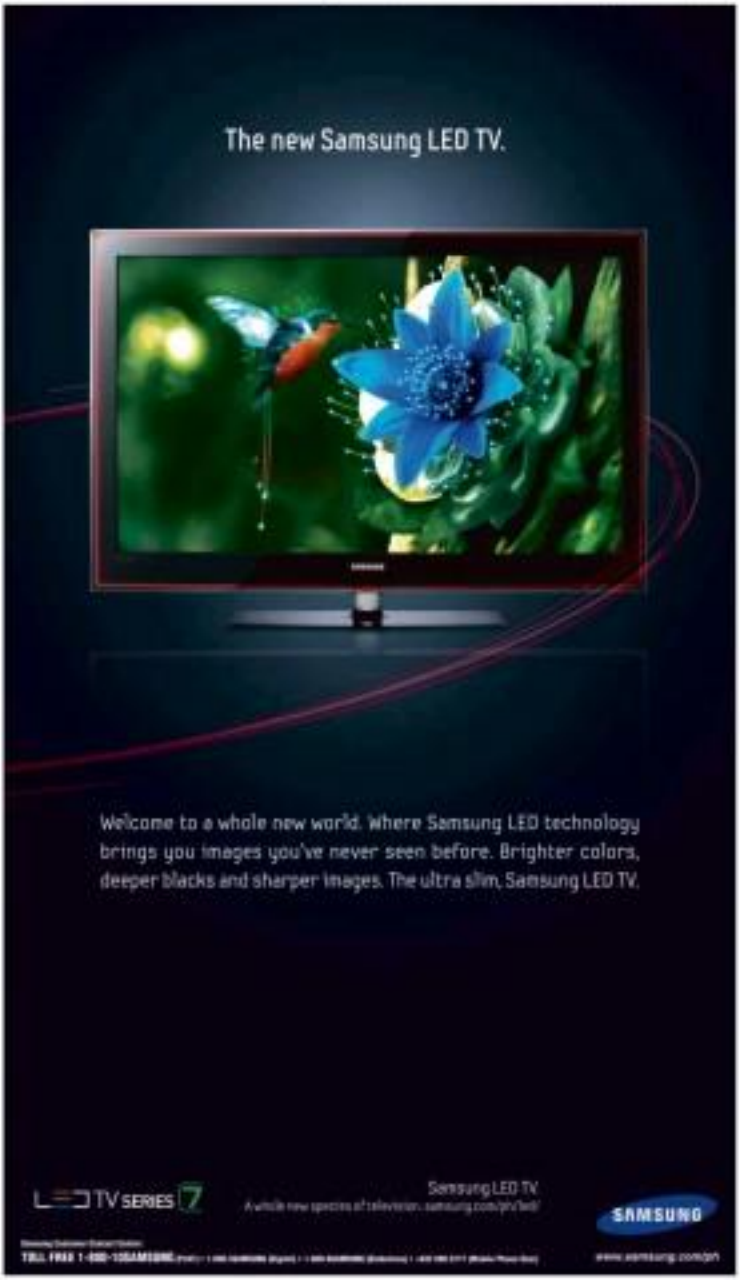
Estrada's lawyers filed a motion with the Sandiganbayan Special Division asking the court to issue an order to the Bureau of Immigration that would allow him to travel overseas.

The Department of Justice had ordered the issuance of a hold departure order against Estrada in June 2001 after he was accused of plunder, among other charges.

The former president's motion read: "President Joseph Ejercito Estrada, by counsel, respectfully moves for the issuance of an Order lifting the Hold Departure Order issued by this Honorable Court considering his acquittal and/or the termination of the proceedings in Criminal Case Nos. 26565, 25836, 26925 and the alternate pardon given to him in connection with Criminal Case No. 26558."

The Special Division acquitted Estrada of two counts of perjury and illegal use of alias but convicted him of plunder in September 2007.

According to the court ruling, Estrada was convicted because he "took advantage of his official position, authority, relationship, connection and influence to unjustly enrich himself at the expense and to the damage and prejudice of the Filipino people and the Republic of the Philippines."



GMA flies today to Indonesia

PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-ARROYO is flying to Indonesia this afternoon to meet with leaders from the other Coral Triangle countries—Malaysia, East Timor, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea—and approve a joint plan to protect the region's vast marine ecosystem threatened by climate change.

The Coral Triangle Initiative Summit in Manado, North Sulawesi, is part of the ongoing World Ocean Conference, the first international meeting on the relationship between oceans and climate change.

During the conference, Ms Arroyo will call for "bolder and significant cuts in greenhouse gas emissions by developed countries," according to Heherson Alvarez, her adviser on global warming and climate change.

In a statement, Alvarez said the Philippines would seek emission cuts of 50 percent below 1990 levels by 2022.

"The cut is not just to avert climate change but to avert sweeping climate change," Alvarez said. "We cannot wait for global emissions to peak in 2050 while we suffer from unwanted devastation of our land and our people."

Ms Arroyo will fly to Manado from Bacolod City where she would first board our "love boat, Bo mister project manda" on Thursday.

In the evening, she will attend a gala dinner to be hosted by Indonesian President Susilo Yudhoyono.

Ms Arroyo will deliver a speech at the Coral Triangle Initiative Summit to be held at the Grand Kawanua Convention Center on Friday. She is expected to be back in Manila at 2:40 p.m. on the same day. Christine F. Esguerra

TOMORROW'S ENVIRONMENTALISTS Costumed kindergarten students perform during the World Ocean Conference and Coral Triangle Initiative Summit in Manado, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. The summit aims to shape the scientific debate ahead of final negotiations to replace the UN treaty on global warming in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December. AP

Climate change threatens 100M in Southeast Asia

From page A1

reports answer to the Amazon rainforest.

The Coral Triangle—which spans the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and East Timor—makes up 30 percent of the world's coral reefs and 35 percent of coral reef fish species.

If carbon emissions are not cut by 25 percent to 40 percent by the year 2020, higher ocean temperatures could kill off most of the ecosystems and half the fish in them, according to the WWF.

Successor agreement

The group said that collapse of the reefs would send food production in the region plummeting by 60 percent.

Such a disaster, according to the WWF, would imperil the livelihoods of a third of the 500 million people now earning a living off the area's natural resources, leaving them to leave the coast to find jobs in teeming cities.

Commercial fishing in the area generates roughly $3 billion in annual income.

Ministers and officials from over 70 countries are meeting in the Indonesian city of Manado for the World Ocean Conference, the first global meeting on the relationship between oceans and climate change.

Nations at the conference are hoping to pass a joint declaration aimed at influencing the discussions of the global climate talks in the Danish capital Copenhagen in December to work out a successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012.

Gone by end of century

"If we don't do anything, then the reefs are going to be gone by the end of this century and the impact on food security and livelihoods will be very significant," WWF Coral Triangle Initiative Network head Lida Pet-Soede told Agence France-Presse.

"Some of the locations in the Coral Triangle are really important areas for all sorts of fish. The migration of tuna and turtles that spawn in the Coral Triangle are not going to have a safe generation," Soede said.

"Decisive action must be taken immediately or a major crisis will develop," the WWF report said, citing 500 scientific studies and 20 climate change experts.

Deep emission cuts

"Hundreds of thousands of unique species, entire ecosystems and societies will be in jeopardy."

Saving the Coral Triangle will require countries to commit to deep cuts in carbon-gas emissions when they gather for the Copenhagen talks.

Emissions cuts of 90 percent below 1990 levels by 2050 would be needed to avert the worst effects on the Coral Triangle, according to the report.

Here-trapping carbon gases, mainly those burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas—are blamed for warming Earth's atmosphere and driving changes in weather patterns.

Overfishing

Local communities and governments will also have to curb overfishing and pollution, according to the WWF.

"If you convince divers the path of the overexploitation of resources, even if you get an incredible reduction in emissions there will still be a threat," said WWF climate campaigner Richard Leck.

A conservation meeting will also unite leaders from the six Coral Triangle nations pass a joint plan on conserving the region.

WWF campaigner Leck said any agreement to save the Coral Triangle would help float damage to the region, which despite glowing forecasts would likely be among the reef regions shown to be ravaged by climate change.

"The Coral Triangle is potentially more resilient than other coral areas around the world and what is amazing is the level of political commitment we are seeing this week," he said.

UN funding

The US government is providing $40 million in funding for a five-year program in the Coral Triangle to improve management of marine and coastal resources.

"We are looking to promote better understanding of the role of the ocean to the climate system," said Mary M. Glackin, US deputy undersecretary for oceans and atmosphere.

"It's really a web of life. So you need to be concerned about the very smallest thing up to the very high predators," she said. Reports, from AFP and AP

Human error cause of A(H1N1) probed

From page A1

movement, said in an interview on May 11.

"You really want a very sober assessment" of the science behind the claim, he said.

Globe, tubo has studied genie evaluation for four decades, is one of the first scientists to analyze the genetic makeup of the virus that was identified three weeks ago in Mexico and threatens to touch off the first flu pandemic since 1968.

'Could be a mistake'

A virus that resulted from lab experiments carried out under poor safety conditions a greater need for security, Fukuda said.

By pinpointing the source of the virus, scientists also may better understand the microbe's potential for spreading and causing illness, Globe said.

"The sooner we get to grips with where it's come from, the safer things might become," Globe said by phone from Canberra yesterday.

"It could be a mistake" that occurred as a routine production facility or the virus could have jumped from a pig to another mammal or a bird before reaching humans, he said.

No evidence

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta has also received Globe report and has decided there is no evidence to support his conclusion, said Nancy Cox, director of the agency's influenza division.

Most researchers don't have samples of swine flu viruses from South America and Africa, where the new strain may have evolved, those regions can't be ruled out as natural sources for the new flu, Cox said.

"We are interested in the origins of this new influenza virus," she said.

"But contrary to what the author has found, we've seen the flu mutations that are most relevant, those to see evidence that this virus was derived by passage in eggs."

Wild idea

Globe, who says he studies the evolution of flu viruses as a "retirement hobby" exposes his research to be challenged by other scientists.

"This is how science progresses," he said. "Somebody comes up with a wild idea, and then they all pounce on it and kick you to death, and then you start off on another idea," Globe.

Globe spent most of his academic career working at the University of Melbourne, but in the study of influenza centered in 1975, while collaborating with scientists Graeme Laver and Robert Webster in research that led to the development of the antiflu medicines Tamiflu and Relenza, made by GlaxoSmithKline Plc.

2nd cases in China, HK

Also yesterday, China ramped up efforts to contain swine flu as it confirmed a second case on the mainland. The sufferer, identified only by the surname Lu, arrived in Beijing on a plane from Canada on May 9, and entered feeling feverish on Sunday.

State news agency Xinhua said the man was under treatment in eastern China's Shandong province where he had arrived by train after his return flight.

The 27 passengers and crew traveled the train in Shandong having a strong fever, the health ministry said, and showed local authorities who picked him up on arrival.

Hong Kong also said a 24-year-old citizen returning from the United States was confirmed on Wednesday as the Chinese territory's second case of swine flu.

2 weeks spent

The unidentified Hong Kong man arrived on Monday with a sore throat after a flight from San Francisco, said Dr. Thomas Tsang, controller with the city's Center for Health Protection.

The man, who checked into an airport clinic following his arrival before being transported to a local hospital, was in stable condition.

The discovery comes exactly two weeks after Hong Kong confirmed its first swine flu patient, a 25-year-old Mexican whose story is the only link authorities to link dozens cases downtown hotel—along with hundreds of guests and staff—to the swine flu.

China has already isolated 349 people, including foreigners, who travelled with the mainland's first swine flu case. The government urged anyone who travelled on the train or plane with the second suspected case to report in.

Hugely complex task

The latest case in China raises the prospect of hundreds more having to be traced and quarantined—a hugely complex task in the world's most populous nation.

The WHO on Wednesday said that more than 3,700 cases had been reported in 33 nations, around half of them—including three deaths—in the United States.

More than 2,300 other cases are in Mexico, the origin of the outbreak where the WHO has confirmed 58 fatalities and national authorities reported a further two.

Cuba, Ireland and Thailand reported their first cases on Tuesday, while Canada said the swine flu virus had reached the Northwest Territories in the north, which crosses the Arctic Circle. With reports from AFP and AP

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Butuan bishop retires

A THIRD FILIPINO BISHOP HAS RESIGNED ahead of the mandatory retirement age of 75.

Pope Benedict XVI accepted the resignation of Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus Ricardo Baccay, 80, of the Diocese of Butuan on May 7, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines announced.

In its website, the CBCP said Canon 401 under the Church's Code of Canon Law was applied in Baccay's case.

Canon 401 states: "A diocesan bishop who has completed his 75th year of age is requested to offer his resignation from office to the Supreme Pontiff who, taking all the circumstances into account, will make provision accordingly."

"A diocesan bishop who, because of illness or some other grave reason, has become unsuited for the fulfillment of his office, is earnestly requested to offer his resignation from office."

The CBCP did not say whether Baccay resigned because of illness or "other grave reasons."

In some cases a bishop is asked by the Vatican to delay his retirement, as in the case of Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales who is already 76.

The CBCP said the Pope, in 2007, had also accepted the resignation of Marciano Bishop Jesus Cabrera who was from Borongan, and Legazpi Bishop Nestor Cardin, who was then 69.

Another Nicole?

A FILIPINO WOMAN HAS SOUGHT THE help of a militant women's group after she was allegedly raped by a member of the US Marines Corps in Makati City.

Cristina Palabay, secretary general of the Gabriela, said yesterday the woman went to their office in Quezon City and related her ordeal to the hands of a Caucasian male who reportedly turned out to be a US serviceman.

Palabay said the incident happened on a Makati hotel on April 30, but she declined to give other details of the woman's identity. She said the woman says the supposed US soldier is also in The Fort, Taguig City a few days before the alleged rape happened. She gave no other details.

The woman, she said, would attend a press conference of the Gabriela party-list today.

However, Palabay said the women was not keen on pursuing the case against her attacker.

"She said she was afraid that she might suffer the same way Vinson did when she raped (Lance Corporal) Daniel Smith," Palabay said over the phone.

Customs exec with ₱17 M probed

By Marlon Ramos

THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN has summoned a top-ranked Bureau of Customs official for allegedly amassing more than ₱17 million in unexplained wealth.

The mid-rank body directed BoC intelligence officer Eric Alfonso to answer with a counter-affidavit the criminal and administrative charges filed against him by the Revenue Integrity Protection Service (RIPS), the anti-corruption unit of the finance department.

Mary Susan Gultiérrez, director of the Ombudsman's preliminary investigation and administrative adjudication bureau, said the Ombudsman found "enough basis to proceed with the administrative adjudication" of the case against Alfonso.

In the Ombudsman's order, dated April 17, Alfonso was also asked to file the sworn statements of his witnesses and other documents that may help him in his defense.

Alfonso, 36, the operations chief of the BoC's Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service, faces charges of violating the Anti-Graft Law, perjury, dishonesty, falsification of public documents and violation of Republic Act 6713, or the Code of Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees.

The RIPS also asked the Ombudsman to confiscate the assets of Alfonso and his family.

If found guilty, Alfonso could be dismissed from government service and serve a jail term.

The Inquirer tried to contact Alfonso, but a staff member of his office said he was not around.

RIPS said its field investigators discovered that Alfonso had acquired assets worth over ₱17 million despite his limited income as a government employee for 20 years.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Thursday, May 14, 2009
Matthias, apostle

1st Reading: Acts 1:15-17, 20-26
Gospel: Jn 15:9-17

Jesus said to his disciples, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; remain in my love. You will remain in my love if you keep my commandments, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

"I have told you all this, that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this, to give one's life for one's friends. And you are my friends if you do what I command you.

"I shall not call you servants any more, because servants do not know what their master is about. Instead I have called you friends, since I have told you everything I have learned from my Father. You did not choose me; it was I who chose you and send you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. And everything you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. What I do say commandment, that you love one another."

Commentary:

Love is a word that has been confused for many years now. Society has forced love into what it is not supposed to be. We say we love certain things and we tell people we love them. Love has so many different connotations that we need to be careful how we use the word, so that God's love can be communicated through our actions. Jesus is the best way to communicate God's love is simply to speak of how God has made a difference in our lives.

Loving others can be very difficult. Jesus knew. He disciples would have a hard time loving each other, because they were human and had different personalities. We are all different from each other—that is the beautiful way God made us. However, it brings us challenges when we have to deal with personalities, and that is where love needs to come into the picture. We need to learn to love each other at the same time as we appreciate our differences. We should love more effectively like because we know in mind are commendable, but because we want to!

Carmelo Diamante Apostolate, Inc., 8 Mapagsa St. UP Village, Diliman, Quezon City (P.O. Box 4) Telefax: 433-7000, 981-8500, 981-8501, 981-8502, 981-8503, 981-8504, 981-8505, 981-8506, 981-8507, 981-8508, 981-8509, 981-8510, 981-8511, 981-8512, 981-8513, 981-8514, 981-8515, 981-8516, 981-8517, 981-8518, 981-8519, 981-8520, 981-8521, 981-8522, 981-8523, 981-8524, 981-8525, 981-8526, 981-8527, 981-8528, 981-8529, 981-8530, 981-8531, 981-8532, 981-8533, 981-8534, 981-8535, 981-8536, 981-8537, 981-8538, 981-8539, 981-8540, 981-8541, 981-8542, 981-8543, 981-8544, 981-8545, 981-8546, 981-8547, 981-8548, 981-8549, 981-8550, 981-8551, 981-8552, 981-8553, 981-8554, 981-8555, 981-8556, 981-8557, 981-8558, 981-8559, 981-8560, 981-8561, 981-8562, 981-8563, 981-8564, 981-8565, 981-8566, 981-8567, 981-8568, 981-8569, 981-8570, 981-8571, 981-8572, 981-8573, 981-8574, 981-8575, 981-8576, 981-8577, 981-8578, 981-8579, 981-8580, 981-8581, 981-8582, 981-8583, 981-8584, 981-8585, 981-8586, 981-8587, 981-8588, 981-8589, 981-8590, 981-8591, 981-8592, 981-8593, 981-8594, 981-8595, 981-8596, 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And then there are 6 ... to speak for GMA

From page A-1

two more spokespersons to talk with the media in her behalf—Undersecretary Rolly Tungcahan, deputy director general of the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda), and Gary Olivar, a professor at Asian Institute of Management (AIM).

As Ms Arroyo's spokespersons on economic matters, the two men will help the administration "dish out accurate information" that will help the public better understand our economic condition," Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita yesterday told reporters at a briefing.

"The President feels that all hands must be asked to unite in keeping our public well informed, especially now that we have the global crisis," Ermita said.

Main man, etc.

With the fresh appointments, Mr Arroyo's mouthpieces are now a crowded group of six.

The main man is Ermita, who has two deputies—Anthony Golez and Lucito Bautista. Press Secretary Cerge Remonde, who was confirmed by the Commission on Appointments yesterday, also speaks for her. (See story on this page.)

Asked why Ms Arroyo needed more as many as six spokespersons, Ermita said: "[The number] can really never be enough. We can have one, two, four or six. The important thing is we have a deep reach in giving the public accurate information."

Ermita said Tungcahan and Olivar would make good spokespersons on economic matters, noting that the two had long been active in the public and private sectors, respectively.

"It's better for [the public] to get information from people who are knowledgeable on those matters so they won't scare the general mass of the economy," he said, adding:

"If other people who are not from the field of economics speak, people might say that we're just taking them for a ride.

"But if we have ... qualified people talking about the subject matter, then the people will believe that the ship of state is moving forward toward its objectives. [And] in spite of muddled waters, we'll get to our destination."

'No-brainer'

Ermita formally introduced Olivar at his weekly news forum yesterday at the Palace. Tungcahan has been visible at recent media forums, such as the one held at Imperial Hotel in Antartar, Cebu, on Tuesday.

Olivar, for his part, said he was sure that he did not take long for him to decide to accept the job "because I have a lot of good material to work with."

"With a President like that, the kind of achievements she had, her policy thinking, her agenda—it's a no-brainer," he said.

He described Tungcahan as "one of the brightest young stars in the economic technocracy."

Solid credentials

Olivar said he knew Ms Arroyo because both of them were economics professors of the University of the Philippines. He earned his master's degree in business administration in Harvard University in 1982.

In his website, AIM describes Olivar as "a senior financial executive for 25 years" with a "solid international and domestic experience in telecommunications and banking."

LBAANBRIEFS/LAPPHOTO/AL Press Secretary Cerge Remonde does not only get a quick nod from the Commission on Appointments but words of admiration from lawmakers including Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile who also notes the Visayan's "peculiar English accent."

Remonde gets swift CA confirmation

By Christine O. Avendaño

CERGE REMONDE, "PECULIAR ENglish accent" and all, was yesterday unanimously confirmed prior necessary by the Commission on Appointments (CA).

Remonde took only five minutes at the CA committee level headed by Batangas Rep. Hermi Brazil—Brazil believe he got final approval in the plenary session led by Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile.

It was the first time Remonde faced the powerful commission since President Macapagal-Arroyo named him press secretary three months ago. He replaced Jesus Dureza, now Mr Arroyo's chief legal counsel.

Before then, Remonde headed the Presidential Management Staff.

Enrile said Remonde was "a special case"—the only government official to be confirmed by the CA "by his tone, his accent" during the session's minute.

"That only shows he is doing his job well," Enrile said.

Smooth sailing

It was smooth sailing for Remonde at the plenary session attended by 23 senators and congressmen.

"I always love your handsome reading face on television and hear your peculiar English accent," Enrile told the Cebu-born press secretary, eliciting laughter from those present.

Opposition Sen. Rodolfo Biazon said he personally knew Remonde, "having occupied with him in solving humanitarian problems."

According to Biazon, Remonde is able to perform his job as defender of the Arroyo administration, "except he is too eager to defend it even[when there is no threat."

"Your because of his eagerness, I of

for no objection to his confirmation," Biazon said.

'Fightingest'

Talking with reporters, Enrile said he had known Remonde, a journalist before he joined the Arroyo administration in 2001, for a long time, and found him to be the "fightingest" media personality."

Remonde recalled the Senate president for giving him his first scoop and humor story at the Manila Bulletin, where he was a correspondent.

"I interviewed him about his stand on [four-year-terms] he was beginning to declare his independence from martial law," Remonde said of Enrile, then the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos' defense minister.

Enrile recalled that Remonde solicited only for the interview.

He said Remonde asked him "very penetrating questions," and that he told himself, "He's a good correspondent."

"And he did," Enrile added.

'Most difficult job'

Remonde thanked Enrile and the CA members for approving his appointment.

In response, he said his earth confirmation was probably because Arroyo "knows I have the most difficult and thankless job in Malacañang."

Asked if he saw himself defending the President until the last days of her term in 2010, Remonde said: "The job of press secretary is not only to defend the President but [also] to help ensure that the government has a voice in the marketplace of ideas."

He said he saw himself continuing to explain to the public the position of Ms Arroyo and the government on issues.

"So they see how do you defend the truth [or] by also speaking with a louder voice?" he said.

Erap warns of trouble if Cha-cha on; Binay says it's open secret

From page A-1

structural change."

"The poor, who constitute more than three-fourths of our population, desperately want out of their extreme poverty. They see their liberation from poverty as coming from a change in administration, not a change of the Constitution," he said.

Visits to every town

Binay, who visited Pampanga and met with Gov. Eddie Panlilio and other local officials in the last week of April, called attention to Ms Arroyo's visits to almost every province—even the remotest ones—in her term.

This is not how a politician about to leave office behaves, he said.

Binay has long insisted that the Charter change moves by the President's allies in the House of Representatives were intended to prolong her stay in power through a parliamentary shift in government.

"I have said from the start that Ms Arroyo has no intention of retiring or going away quietly. And if the reports are accurate, being prime minister is only one of her options," Binay said.

"For now, the goal is to succeed in getting the Supreme Court to rule in favor of Charter change. Reports of emergency rule or martial law prior to or as a result of withdrawal of elections in 2010 persist," he said.

'Speculation' only

But Press Secretary Cerge Remonde dismissed all that as "nothing but speculation in the scheme of this political movements. [given] that we're a year away from a presidential election."

Remonde told reporters that the President and Palace officials were not even discussing politics or the Charter change moves in the House.

He refused what officials had earlier said—that there would be no moratorium to amend the Constitution, and that Malacañang was neutral on "election modes."

Shielding beside Remonde after the latter's confirmation by the Commission on Appointments, Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile said his "presidential" aim that the 20 Filipinistas would push through.

Enrile said the chance of amending the Constitution was near "zero" because of the long process it entailed.

"If Charter change] is something you cannot rush. It has to be thoroughly debated by the nation, by the people, by all sectors of society because it will affect their lives," he said. "My evaluation is that it's almost an impossibility to rush because of the time constraint."

But should Charter change happen and a parliamentary system is adopted, Mr Arroyo is qualified to be prime minister, Enrile said.

"There is a presumption that being a leader of the nation, she has ... followers. She will be running in her own district and if her party will have the majority of the members of the Parliament, then she will be the prime minister," he said.

'Open' possibility

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita likewise said it was "highly speculative" to say that House resolutions seeking to amend or revise the Constitution could possibly lead to its access meeting for Congress and then as prime minister.

"I can imagine that the case talking about the possibility to only [limiting] ... that will be our President may run for by for election because it is prohibited by the Constitution, that is something that is open," Ermita said of Ortega, the chair of the House committee on constitutional amendments.

But whatever she plans to do with Charter change, Ms Arroyo is not saying, and she is not afraid to face lawsuits after she steps down in 2010, Executive said as his weekly briefing in Malacañang.

"The President has not discussed her plans with us, especially as far as Charter change is concerned," he said.

Administration congressmen are spearheading moves to amend or revise the Constitution with less than a year to go before the May 2010 nationwide elections.

Speaker Prospero Nograles' resolution seeks to lift restrictions on foreign businessmen; Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte's resolution seeks to convene both the House and Senate into a constituent assembly to amend the Charter.

'Only natural'

Remonde said that while Ms Arroyo was indeed making frequent trips to Pampanga, she had not discussed any plans of running for Congress.

"She's from there, and it's only natural for her to visit the province often," he said over radio station dzMM. "I don't go home to Cebu, my province, but that doesn't mean I'm running for a local post there."

Remonde said he doubted that Ms Arroyo would seek a seat to Congress. "If you ask me, it's very hard to go down to a lower position. You can be an elder statesman of the country after your term."

He added that Ms Arroyo would serve the country up to her "last breath," but that for seeking another elective post was "something else."

Ermita balked at the idea that Ms Arroyo should declare in public that she would not seek a congressional post to dispel talk that she wanted to be prime minister and gain immunity from suits.

"I don't think there's really that much need. Definitely, the very thing that we are trying to avoid, and that is [diverting us] from our economic situation, might happen. A statement coming from the Palace, especially from the President, can only will stir a lot of other issues, and therefore, we might be distracted," he said.

Interference

Ermita also rejected a suggestion that Malacañang advise administration lawmakers to stop the Charter change campaign.

"I would ignore us] let them be ... It's not for the President to interfere ... in the function of a separate body of government," he said.

Ermita said Ms Arroyo was aware that she could face lawsuits after she steps down: "[She] is a political figure. She's been President for some time. She knows the things that go with the presidency [as well as not to] [other elective offices or positions]."

"Those are the things happening to the political life of a person. ... The President is aware that those things could very well happen. And [she] is consistent and very confident that even if those things happen, she knows where she stands."

Payback time

Asked if Ms Arroyo feared anything come payback time, Ermita said: "I don't think there's anything to be afraid of."

Ermita also said the declaration of the presidential supreme that they would look an inquiry into corruption allegations involving the Vice Family was not unexpected.

He said Malacañang could not begrudge the supreme because they were protecting themselves as candidates and they made their comments in response to a question on a "speculative nature."

"For the moment, we cannot say anything other than that it is difficult for them to say that they're not going to do anything," Ermita said.

He was referring to lawmakers from Cabanatuan Governor Panlilio, Representative Sermin Gilbert Tenkiko and Pampanga Rep. Juan Richard Gordon and Francis Escudero even each asked if he would support an investigation of the Arroyos if he becomes president.

'Buying immunity'

Senate Pres. Jr. secretary general of the Liberal Party Pampanga Rep. Juan Miguel Zubiri said the President of "desperately seeking to become prime minister" to evade accountability for the human rights abuses that took place under her term.

"Ms Arroyo is desperate in wanting to become prime minister through Charter change," Reyes said in a statement.

"She literally wants to buy immunity ... Once out of power, GMA and her Cabinet and generals may be investigated and prosecuted. For the sake of the rights victims, GMA must be out by 2010," he said.

Reyes pointed out that in April, a Peruvian court sentenced former President Alberto Fujimori and sentenced him to 25 years in prison for human rights abuses.

He said the rights victims "fear" that Ms Arroyo seemed to be evading through Charter change. With reports from Christine O. Avendaño and Nikko Dizon

Comelec reconsiders 4 bidders; back to square one

From page A-1

tal Information Management Corp., AMA group of companies/Election Systems and Software, and Elitec/RE Cruz and Company, Inc./Filipinas Systems Inc.

Bautista said the committee would await the computerization project before the end of the month, noting that its program schedule would fully recover by June.

The four firms will have to undergo final verification screening on Friday to determine the accuracy and validity of the documents attached in their successful bid to be the losers for overall evaluation, he said.

After the validation, the companies will be asked to submit their technical and financial proposals for the project.

Senate up in arms

The Senate was up in arms yesterday over the Comelec's earlier pronouncement stating the possibility of partial automation following the disqualification of the seven bidders.

"If we cannot go automated election in 2010," Enrile said, "The Committee on the Senate oversight will tell the people the truth and nothing but the truth and prepare for a manual election. Otherwise, they will be held responsible."

He recalled that during the Senate hearings, he had warned poll officials to ensure that automation would work and if they had doubts of doing so to prepare for manual elections.

'Imagine country without a president'

"We cannot afford a situation where there is no election," Enrile said.

Should there be no elections next year, he warned that there would be chaos "unless we accept another system of government or installing authority in this country."

"If we maintain the present Constitution and we have no election in 2010, imagine a country without a president, without a vice president, without a Senate, without a Congress, without local governments and mayors to run their local governments. This is chaos. This is going to be anarchy. It's every man for himself," Enrile said.

Comelec derailing program

In an interview with the Inquirer, Rep. Edgardo Angara wondered if the Comelec was deliberately derailing full automation.

Angara asked why the Comelec bid out the precinct count optical scan machines to be used for only 80,000 polling precincts when there are 230,000 precincts all over the country next January.

For the purpose of automation, the Comelec has clustered all polling precincts into 2,238,351.

Angara said that Comelec Chair Jose Melo should not use the disqualification of the seven bidders as justification for partial automation.

He noted that the seven—among the Comelec should have bid out for machines covering 1,668 municipalities and over 180 cities, he said.

"In the publication alone, Comelec announced 80,000 precincts. I don't think it's an oversight. That's deliberate," he said.

"The original assumption is that it's going to be a nationwide automation. In law, Congress approved this partial automation, and the Senate specifically rejected the House proposal due to only certain nationally elected officials," Angara said.

Palace supports Comelec

Angara pointed out that the P11.2-billion allocation was for nationwide automation. "In spite of that, why did you choose to solicit bids only for 80,000 precincts?"

He reiterated that the supplemental budget was a last-ditch measure.

"It is the beginning of a new era of modern elections," Angara said. "It is the first block in confidence building. Such is the Constitution on Elections will begin. This bill is very crucial on the eve of a very crucial election in 2010."

Malacañang yesterday said it had no choice but to support the Comelec if it eventually decides to only recourse balloting in certain urban areas.

"My current changes to that because the conduct of elections is the duty of the Comelec. So we just have to go with it," Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said.

However, the executive branch would await the results of the bidding process, he said.

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Querubin takes 1st step in Senate run

From page A1

he waded into the crowd like a true politician, embracing mothers and smooching babies.

Former grade school classmates volunteered to campaign for the soldier who has been detained for three years for allegedly attempting to overthrow the Arroyo administration in 2006. (See In the know on this page.)

The officer's stepson and spokesperson, Ann Marie Lim, said he had discussed with the colonel the decision announced over the weekend on the hugely popular rocker-turned-rebel soldier's bid to run for a Senate seat, but like another detained rebel officer, Lt. Antonio Trillanes IV, who won while campaigning behind bars in 2007.

Campaign pitfalls discussed

"We spoke about it late night," Lim said, detailing how Querubin sought to map out the pitfalls and advantages of a campaign without political party backing.

At noon in San Fernando City, Querubin outlined his political ambitions when he spoke at Christ the King College in some of his 1989 grade school classmates, who decided to form the initial Querubin Movement for a Better Philippines.

Among the officer's classmates were a banker, a subdivision developer, a government accountant and a fire marshal, who has been known for preaching good causes against his superiors.

Some of them were curious about how Querubin would react should he receive invitations to join the opposition party or the administration party in exchange for his allegiance to President Macapagal-Arroyo.

Switching from English to Ilocano, Querubin answered his classmates that he planned to stay in the opposition. But it did not mean, he said, he would join just any opposition party.

He said there were too many parties vending for opposition ideals, but swearing allegiance to their cause this early would be risky.

Too much political noise

"I could swear allegiance but then I find out they are linked [to the administration] and I must follow party lines. I would be compromised," Querubin said.

Many of these parties, he said, have made "too much political noise" about the Arroyo administration's supposed mistakes, without pursuing their charges in court.

"You can, of course, be opposition[al] government goes wrong ... [because officials] must feel held accountable [at the courts decide ... They have started smashing and smashing but no one has filed a single case," Querubin said.

Lions, a law student, said one of Querubin's first thoughts about a successful campaign was how the public might associate him with Trillanes, one of the leaders of the failed Oakwood mutiny in 2003.

"They are very different, although to the public they appear to be fighting for the same cause," Lions said.

La Union's jewel

The combat veteran was greeted with warm applause, cheers and chants by a number of supporters who had flocked to the barangay hall in Bacnang town to get a glimpse of La Union's "jewel," Lions related.

"There were also protesters present to welcome him. The colonel is very grateful," he added.

Before he accomplished his registration, Querubin dropped by the municipal hall to meet with the mayor and later went to his house to visit his mother.

"This is an essential, necessary step for his senatorial bid," Lions said.

Military won't intervene

The military earlier said that it would not stop Querubin or any of the other detained soldiers from seeking public office next year.

"If they feel that they can contribute to the progress of the country and do more good, then why not?" said Lt. Col. Romeo Brawner Jr.

Aside from Querubin, three illegdute soldiers—former Marine Capt. Gary Alejano, Navy Lt. James Layug and Air Force Capt. Francisco Ashley Acedillo—have declared their intentions to run for office in the 2010 elections. With a report from *IT Espiritu, Inquirer Northern Luzon*

IN THE KNOW

MARINE COL. ABEL QUERUBIN IS ONE OF 2... Mutiny and Array officers facing court-martial ... months charges over a six-hour standoff wit... their superiors at Fort Bonifacio on Feb. 2... 2006.

Querubin and the others are accused of a... tempting to overthrow President Macapagal-A... ears, who two days earlier had declared a sta... of national emergency after a military plan ... withdraw support from her administration.

The brandished officer insists there was a coup plot.

In fact, Querubin was one of 19 serving and r... ired military and police officers of the Young O... ficers Union who, in January 2002, went ... Malacañang to tell the President they were ... through with power grabs and would "fight ... the death" any coup planners.

Relieved of posting

Immediately after the 2006 standoff, Querubin was relieved of his post as commander of the Fort Master Brigade in Camp Emilio Aguinaldo in Quezon City, and was detained at Fort Bonifacio. He is currently held at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City.

In June 2007, he petitioned the Supreme Court to stop the court-martial proceedings, saying he would not get a fair trial from the military. The court denied his petition in July 2008.

Querubin led an assault on Camp Aguinaldo in December 1989—the most serious of 30 coup attempts against the Aquino administration.

The badly injured Querubin was later dumped among dead bodies at Quirino Hospital in Quezon City. Luckily, a doctor noticed his finger twitch. He was then transferred to the V. Luna Medical Center to be nursed back to health.

Querubin was granted amnesty in 1995, after which he remained in the Military.

Medal of Valor

Despite his rebellious past, Querubin was awarded the Medal of Valor, the highest military award for bravery in combat, for leading the March 2000 liberation of Kinawagan town in Lanao del Norte from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the capture of an MILF camp at the province's ...

In 2002, Querubin also led the team that was sent to have killed Abu Sayyaf spokesperson Abu Sabaya in a sea encounter off Zamboanga del Norte.

Querubin is member of Class 1979 of the Philippine Military Academy. He was born on March 2... 1956. —**Cyril L. Bonabesia, *Inquirer Research***

Sources: Inquirer Archives, Inquirer Research Archives, PMA's Sinurot Register

'Ex-general used ₱40M in Balikatan funds'

From page A1

was just out to brainwash his reputation. He said the United States did not disburse Balikatan funds on Sibuyan, contrary to the...

"It is also impossible for me or any commander at that to distribute such amount," he said.

Asst. Rodolfo Elazegui, chair of the Senate defense committee, yesterday said Gudlan should make a formal complaint and send it to him so he could act on her allegations.

Elazegui, a former chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, said that he would address the issue if the money involved came from the Department of National Defense or the AFP.

Gudlan said she had wanted to reveal corruption in Marinduque early on, but that she was being maligned by her superior officers.

She decided to come out only last week after she felt she was being harassed and first talked about the case publicly over Bombo radio in Iloilo City on Tuesday.

Tables turned

Upon learning about her disclosure, Lt. Col. Romeo Brawner Jr. turned the tables on Gudlan.

The AFP spokesperson said the US Armed Forces had not released any funds to its Philippine counterpart, which had its own corresponding amount allotted for the annual joint military exercises.

Brawner also said Gudlan was facing dismissal by the Discovery and Separation Board for malfeasance for failing to account for ₱2.5 million supposedly disbursed to her without Gudlan's knowledge.

"Because of that, she was placed under investigation two years ago," Brawner told reporters in an interview at Camp Aguinaldo.

Gudlan is also facing charges before the board of entertainment for allegedly failing to account for ₱2,500 in hotel accommodations in 2007, gross misconduct and insubordination for refusing to be subjected to an investigation.

Un-grievance machinery

Denying the allegations, Gudlan said she never handled the ₱2.5 million as she was not the fund custodian at that time.

"I only acted as a facilitator of the operations team's requirements," she said. "Just to make it clear, there was no money handed to me and I did not manage the funds."

Gudlan said the filing of charges against her was merely an attempt by high-ranking officers to get back at her for "harming too much about corruption in the Balikatan exercises."

In a statement, Navy spokesperson Lt. Col. Miguel Acevedo said Gudlan's allegations were serious enough to warrant administration and investigation.

"My sympathy to some not in the news, forwarder her allegations and address evidence. The Navy will help her clear her name," Acevedo said.

He also reminded Gudlan that pending the approval of her resignation, which was filed on April 16, she would have to make use of the military's grievance machinery to air her allegations and grievances.

"This is as per to bespeak the good name and reputation of the institution she continues to serve," Acevedo said.

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CEBU PACIFIC AIR.COM

WHO official in child abuse rap hospitalized

From page A1

molester and pimp upon the request of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group's Women and Children Protection Division that the names be withheld in compliance with the 2003 Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act.

The law's confidentiality clause covers both victims and accused in a trafficking case.

A brief entry in the logbook of the PNP's Criminal Investigation and Detection Division (CIDG) said the Australian had complained about his "physical condition" and said that he experienced "chilling."

CIDG custodians took him to the nearby hospital, which is also inside Camp Crame. The bayonne went to check but was denied access.

Members of the Australian's defense team said they had been informed by PNP of the matter. They said they had no firm factual information on the Australian's condition but were told that he was a diabetic and was pale when he was taken to the emergency room.

Stable condition

Speaking off the record, police sources said the man's condition had stabilized but that he was still in the emergency room under-round-the-clock police guard.

No names

The Australian, along with his Filipino companion, has been held at the CIDG detention cell since May 8. They were arrested for allegedly molesting a 12-year-old boy in the Australian's parked car at the parking lot of a pink condominium building in Makati City.

The 23-year-old Filipino was said to have served as the pimp.

No bail

The Australian was ordered indicted by Prosecutor Benjamin Serang for violation of Republic Act No. 7610 (Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse) and Republic Act No. 9208 for "engaging the services of a trafficked person."

No bail was recommended for the first charge, bail of P200,000 was set for the second.

The Filipino was ordered charged with qualified trafficking in persons under RA 9208. No bail was recommended.

An official of the Australian Embassy visited the purported customer's detention quarters at the CIDG at past noon yesterday. Australian officials have been coordinating with local police since the time of the man's arrest.

Police are still tracking down at least 10 other boys believed to have also fallen victim to the Australian, who has reportedly been staying here for seven years.

Pimp's ex child-rights advocate

The purported pimp may have been a victim of molestation himself, according to the elder sister Marian, an officer of a nongovernment organization that sponsors children's education.

The sad story of how the sexual abuse began was told by Marian, who went to the Makati Regional Trial Court yesterday to get a copy of the criminal charges filed against the Australian and her brother.

Marian said her brother was the youngest of six siblings.

"According to the unsung officer, he was molested before, though I couldn't confirm it because he wouldn't speak about it to his family," she told the Inquirer.

"But I think he could have been molested. I can't think of any other way that he could have met the Australian," she said.

But whether her brother was molested or not, Marian said the believed there was no excuse for his involvement, especially because she was a child-rights advocate.

"I was really shocked. Hyungsa-hiling ako, hindi ako nanniwala (Of course, being his elder sister, I could not believe it). But my other half is hesitant. I've been fighting against this for so long ... Hindi pwedeng dapat naghahalo-halo ganyan (One can't always play blind)," she said.

Responsibility

Marian said she felt somehow responsible for what had happened to her brother, who she described as "modest" (mahiin).

"Maybe because of my busy schedule, I wasn't able to guide him ... I'm usually not at home at night due to my involvement at a Catholic group," she said.

Her brother's only "sins," she said, was hanging out with friends and neighbors. He also hardly used the computer, and the family did not have Internet access at home.

Marian said her brother had stopped going to school because he hardly had money for transportation. But she said the family was "not that poor" for him to resort to something like pimping.

Like play

"It's only now that he's realizing the consequences of what he did. Sa Aninya kasi, parang laro-laro lang (It was like play to him). It's really painful for our family, especially since our mom is afflicted with hypertension and diabetes," she said.

At the time of the arrest, Marian's brother was on the back seat of the Australian's car and the 12-year-old boy was in the front passenger seat.

The boy said in his sworn statement that the "pimp" introduced him as the 47-year-old foreigner called "Daddy" sometime in April.

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OPINION

Is the worst over?

EDITORIAL

A HIGH OFFICIAL OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC and Development Authority certainly thinks a case can be made for saying so. Key indicators suggest that "the worst seems over ... for the Philippine economy," said Neda Deputy Director General Rolando Tungcahin the other day.

We are not so sure, and would recommend, in the matter, an ounce of caution rather than a rash dose of premature optimism.

The Neda cue certainly points to some encouraging signs. It is possible that the US economy, our largest trading partner, may recover from its deepest recession in generations before the end of 2009. At least 100,000 jobs abroad are available to Filipino applicants, according to Tungcahin. Export firms in Cebu are beginning to re-hire laid-off workers to meet increasing demand. And, our least: "Inflation is now down to 4.8 percent. It is rapidly falling and will boost personal consumption."

The Neda is not alone in the silver-lining business. The other day, the Bangko Sentral asserted that remittances from overseas contract workers, which last year reached a record $16.4 billion, "are expected to be steady and will continue to drive consumption and growth."

The statements from Neda and Bangko Sentral experts are valuable precisely because, while they are policy-making agencies of government, they are perceived to be scrupulously non-political. But we cannot help but think that these agencies have been cheering some cheerleading for the Philippine economy perhaps without being aware of it.

We can certainly understand their dilemma: How does one signal to investors and consumers alike that the fundamentals remain sound, without inspiring or adding to a sense of complacency? How does one encourage businessmen and employees alike to use the global financial crisis as a rare opportunity to cut costs to add to one's savings, to re-engineer processes, learn new skills, reinvent ourselves—without fostering a sense of panic? It's a difficult balancing act (one that other governments, too, are finding tricky).

One possibility for the Bangko Sentral and Neda and other such agencies is to stick to the statistics—and steer clear of the rhetoric.

Tungcahin's conclusion, for instance, that "the worst seems over" may or may not be justified by the economic indicators. The point is, perhaps it was not for him to say so.

We can point to other indicators which can lead a reasonable observer to the opposite conclusion.

On exports, Tungcahin referred to the uptick in monthly export earnings as "indicating signs of the easing recession in trading countries." It's true that the March 2009 figure was 15.9 percent higher than the February 2009 figure—but it was also 30.9 percent less than the March 2008 total. In other words, we aren't anywhere near last year's numbers.

Net foreign direct investment fell by a dizzying 82 percent in February. That is to say, the net inflow of $90 million recorded in February 2008 fell to $16 million—less about what hosting Icon Manny Pacquiao stood to earn from his demolition of British fighter Ricky Hatton—in February 2009.

Remittances, one of the economy's main engines of growth, depend on the number of Filipino contract workers deployed abroad. According to revised (and partial) figures from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, the number of newly hired land-based workers deployed abroad in 2008 went down by almost 16 percent from 2007. To give only one example: Saudi Arabia, the usual top destination, hired 20,000 fewer Filipinos last year than it did in 2007.

What this partial revision does is put into question the estimate that a total of 1.1 million Filipinos are working overseas. As an industry consultant told the Inquirer: "I think it's impossible to have 1.1 million total deployment if the numbers of new hires annually declined and no new major market opened up in 2008."

Of course, it may well be true that to the global financial crisis the country has already turned the corner. But it is also just as likely to be true that some of the crisis' economic effects have not been felt in the Philippines yet. We should have a better idea in the next few months. But in the meantime, it seems to be good policy to assume that the worst is not yet over. To say otherwise is to invite complacency.

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Timeline

VIEWPOINT

Juan L. Mercado

HORRORS ERUPTS IN 4 SUBWAY EXCESSES, Cebu City finds itself mobilized with an overnight legacy: 165 "murders with a smile." The timeline is instructive.

Democrats don't regard killings have spilled into Cebu, UN special rapporteur Philip Alston writes. His follow-up report to the UN Human Rights Council also pinpoints killing fields in Cotabato, Davao, Digos and Tagum.

Killings by squad members do not seem to [have] declined from 1 July 2007 to 30th June 2008, he said. Mayor Rodrigo Duterte hasn't solved a single case.

"In a week, death squad members operate with complete impunity," Alston added. "Killing for hire is on the rise as death squad members become bold enough to sell their services ... A killing costs between P5,000 [roughly US$116] to P15,000."

The results to impunity. Although killings take place in broad daylight, "witnesses are not prepared to testify ... [Impunity] encourages death squad killings to spread to other cities beyond Davao."

Cebu City Mayor Tomas Osmeña enthusiastically endorsed the Davao example. In December 2006, he whipped up a so-called "Firemen' Brain." He announced cash for each homicide: P50,000 for policemen who assist "permanently disable" cash criminal.

The killing of Mr. whether by an abolitionist or vigilante, is evil, Cardinal Ricardo Vidal bluntly said. "Use to reject" dislodges the Constitution and its guarantees of life and due process, the foundation that sustained.

"Pill Mayor Osmeña says the Davao death squads operating with impunity?" asked Vera Files. "The 1986 commission participants may have embedded a vigilante mindset in Davao. But Cebu never had a tradition of extraordinary de la muerte. If Osmeña goes down this path, blood will mire his already cluttered legacy."

Osmeña counters by [what]. He merely lit his cousin's. Did they not [have] to murderers with their council silence? In any case, Osmeña pursued Duterte's tough-guy talk.

"Here in Davao, you can't go out alive," Duterte said after a notorious Manila drug lord's release. "You can go out, but inside a coffin. Is that what you call extrajudicial killings? Then, I will bring a thing [or] to a palace and kill him down. That will no longer be extrajudicial."

Such statements suggest that "he is, in fact, supportive" of the slayings, Alston noted.

"Supervisor should teach us to be mute as passed down government's purposes are beneficent," Justice Dante Bautista observed.

Osmeña claims his purposes are [besides] pure. "We'll respect human rights," he said. "We'll go to the law's limit and whack down. I'm more interested in protecting citizens." Wish. Wish. Wish.

He couldn't be bothered with checking if rules of engagement were kept. Such statements [sounded] serial killings. They were like a legacy that Columbine never sought.

"It's been a year now since Mr. Hunter launched his 'murder with a smile' policy," the Cebu Daily News [wrote] in February 2008. "What has he to show for [murdered] killers who salvage with impunity in a city pumping for the boom decades?"

Some 117 murdered robbers later, Cebu has been tagged "murder capital," the daily noted. "The crime statistics figure, Tangub and several Somes. That statistics is noted by the PS State Department in its annual human rights report. It foreshadows last week's Alston statement.

Like Davao, vigilante victims in Cebu were petty criminals. "Those did time in jail. Some served rehabilitation [by] Osmeña's Operation Manos were sometimes when snuffed out. "It wish denied them a second chance."

"Drug lords aren't scared," Cebu Daily News [wrote]. "Corrupt officials can't see. So big fish [has been landed]." Cebu's crime slump only when Mayor Duterte [takes] over the city.

"I'm not exactly proud of that record," Osmeña admitted. "But I'm not exactly sad that criminals were killed." It's a question of dosage. Wink. Wink.

But human life been stripped to subhuman doses? Who decides when blood is to be a dosage? And who says stop? Or more.

"Osmeña prides himself as an honorable man," Newsweek added. "At P20,000 per head, the 'purified' 117 victims mean the mayor, in boosting his worth, paid P2.34 million.

"It's taken to use public funds for crime payrolls. Philanthropy, however, is not one of his strong suits. So, who provided the clerkin' friends' disappearances? Did they claim them as 'tax deductions?'"

"Every unprosecuted murder takes away something from the security of every man's life," Daniel Pelaez said. Today's [prevention of inhumanities is possible only if citizens acquiesce.

Salvaging is "a cheap price to pay for peace and order," some Cebuanos and Davaoeños say. They will lay down the lives of others, not their own. Where [are] pedestrians begin, the right of "criminals" end.

Supreme Court [minutes] like the sort of arrogance [and] is bestial [as] the modern rule. Human Rights helped ramp down murders from 210 in 2006 to 64 in 2008. So did Alston's meticulous documentation and dogged resolve.

Government "deserves credit" for sending a strong message, although informal, in the killings, Alston noted. But "the state's responsibility cannot be discharged by the government's failure to institutionalize or implement reforms."

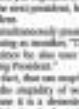
Now ignore Alston," Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez snorted. That dishes the ears of Geneva and Ostrobu.

But the media shrieks: a Cain-like legacy of blood. Osmeña's tough-guy [image] has [been] muffled by governance: "The blood of your brother Abel calls out to Me from the earth."

(E-mail: jamlmercado@gmail.com)

Comedy

THERE'S THE RUB



Conrado de Quiros

MANNY PACQUIAO IS THE FACE OF DETERmination. He'd like nothing better than to fight his next foe. That is, well, whoever he turns his opponent[ial nest in] his sights.

His desire to jump to his new weight class, or ring, has been met with much suspicion by his admirers, not least its government. They have only one advice for him: Don't.

"It would be good," says political adviser Gabriel Claudio. "If he can assess or formulate any plans to join next year's elections based on what is best not only for the locality he is contending to serve but the entire nation as well."

"One or two more big fights," says Bongbong Marcos, "and running for politics would be ok. Finish off the records first."

"Enjoy congressman," says Nicky Castillo. "It is a full time job. He should only be more keen [to be] one year to do this. With his victory, he is now a veteran contender in a boxed official."

I have a different piece of advice for Pacquiao. By all means do. I disagree with Castillo when he says that with his victory, Pacquiao has become a veteran contender for any local position. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that with his victory Pacquiao has become a shoo-in for president.

The last that he lost before when he ran as congressman doesn't matter a bore. It was his mistake to begin with—the same mistake Rudy Fernandez made when he ran for mayor of Quezon City—running for a local position. And he ran for senator, he probably would have won. Local elections are still a matter of logistics, national ones are a matter of popularity. I am probably because Pacquiao does wasn't quite the big deal, or big deal, or epic hero, he is now.

Wouldn't it be the silliest irony if the same government that has been exploiting his deep with the name to contend with their wants should now have to contend with his ambitions? It's enough to make everyone believe in God.

The foreign publications that have [speculated] could become his country's president one day are wrong only in the "one day." He could become his country's president instantly if he wanted to. No one can stop him. Not Noli. Not Erap. Not even GMA, who shows no sign of being consigned to lame duckery. He has become bigger than all of them put together. If Pacquiao decides to become the next president, he will become the next president.

He can become simultaneously president and boxing champion, using as mandate, "The Fighting President." Or, since he also once karaoke, "The Fighting Singing President."

The only thing, in fact, that can stop him is his stubbornly resisting the stupidity of wanting to run. Stupidity because it is a demotion rather than a promotion. He's already champion of the world, much admired by the world, residing in hundreds of millions of hard-earned dollars without grappling with the hundreds of millions of headaches standing in politics but a heir to. Why on earth would he want to demote himself to rules of obliges. Smashing the same are as the pygmies there, reaping one on the all-important [power] of whether he break an egg on the long side or the short side?

But I have another reason for wanting Jinggoing to run for president other than to make it the hardest thing in the world for GMA to stay. That is to show up elections, or indeed politics, for what they usually are: a farce. Pacquiao standing to prepare, ready, appreciate the jaded of politicians as being full time, weigh the worth of public service versus public spectacle, and leave the community's or the nation's interest at heart precedence all the others do. If presidents the people choose the ugliness, it [presidents] like Erap and Nograles do. It presumes the congressmen do. (I presume Castillo does.) When in fact all they do is prepare for reelection by flying to the casino's side each time he fights, study the odds in the various gaming outlets in Las Vegas, spread their waiting hours pleading ways to separate fools, also called taxpayers, from their money, weigh the differential benefits of token work versus pork barrel, and have GMAs—and their wives—interests at heart.

It presumes that elections, and politics, in this country are serious business when they are in fact a comedy. It presumes that the bulk, at least, if not all, of the candidates for public office, especially the presidency, are serious people, when in fact they are either comedians who have taken themselves seriously with laughable results or undertakers who have become comedians without getting results.

The advice that prospective candidates should first study and prepare for a location are. It's the advice the people have been giving the aspirants all this time, particularly when they were threatening to overrun public office. The mind practice was to point to Erap who did exactly that, becoming mayor of San Juan first, then senator, then vice president, before becoming president. Well, all that study and preparation merely taught him how to steal, or how to steal more, better if he had jumped from senator to president, maybe his appetites might not have been found that deeply.

The adviser presumes that Pacquiao are better than entertainers, when they are in fact worse. By far worse. Entertainers formed politicians can only produce bad entertainment. Voters turned road can only want to stay for good. Voters turned president can only stop being a legend and become lame. GMA turned rules his life can only be the lamest of lame ducks.

Of course, we can always have a choice between an entertainer and a crook. We can always demand to have a choice beyond an entertainer and a crook. We can always demand to have a choice between an entertainer and a pope. We can always demand to have a choice between an entertainer and a saint. We can always summon forth, by sheer need and by sheer will, another Cory or Ninoy.

But right now, that is about as near to being possible in Pacquiao is to becoming Muhammad Ali.

People raring to vote in 2010

Political Tidbits

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

In the end he was pliable from the mostly young people for his lack of self-consciousness in talking about her achievements. But it was fascinating watching the wedding walk of the two: here he has an gladiolus orange in rabbit-ease in his armhole as GMA, which approaches the anti-GMA youth. He extended "hosteria" several times, sending the young audience into stitches. But to the older folk he did not sound hollow.

* * *

Last Tuesday I observed that with the number of aspirants joining the presidential race, we would again have a minority president. Pundits have noted that in such situation, the winner would not only be correct in securing a majority but become vulnerable or ousted later-on. A solution to this was offered by Emilio Jay Ansel Gonzalez Jr. last April 13 when he filed House Bill (HB) 183, which calls for run-off elections between the top two candidates should no one get a majority vote. Earlier since a one-off election would require amending the Constitution, Gonzalez proposed that it be treated as a "surgical" constitutional amendment, to bypass constitutionalist Fr. Joaquin Bernas' unwavering pleas. That means, as an exclusive process like an ordinary piece of legislation, it says it has to be passed by a three-fourths vote in each chamber instead of by a simple majority.

* * *

Another problem is that the Constitution requires every amendment be approved directly by the people in a plebiscite. Gonzalez's benefactor, executive dean Dennis Gonzales of the Ateneo School of Government, pointed out it is to send interlocutors with Cecile Alvarez and see that our differences between our systems and Europe's is that in the latter, constitutional amendments are acted upon only by parliament, which explains why innumerable can be passed swiftly. If any questions arise these are brought to a specially-created constitutional court. In the last 60 years, he said, a total of 60 amendments have been approved, or about one for every year of the Bundestag's existence. Even unconstitutionalities have to pass through the proverbial eye of the needle.

* * *

In a recent chat, Comelec Commissioner Rene Sarmiento was careful to point out that there has in fact been no bidding for the project, and that it will have a failure of bidding. What has failed is the effort of bidding companies to satisfy the specifications set forth by Comelec's special bids and awards committee, but he stressed that these companies are allowed to file their bids for reconsideration and complete requirements within three days.

I asked Sarmiento why the Comelec does not follow the suggestion of election lawyer Romulo Macalintal to use the 1,991 machines the Comelec has paid for in the 2007 elections. The latter, who participated in the public bidding, said that the purchase contract with Mega Pacific was invalidated by the Supreme Court; Macalintal recalled that the case was dismissed by the Office of the Ombudsman for lack of evidence, and the money paid was never returned by the supplier. However, Sarmiento was certified as available by Secretary Estrella Alabastro, and the government can move to pay P4 million annually for their storage.

Sarmiento replied that the new Web Automation Law, RA 9369, calls for full automation from the precinct level to the transmission stage (at a total cost of P13.3 billion), whereas the Mega Pacific machines are good only for transmission of city and provincial results, i.e., partial automation.

The Comelec chief has kept the Commission from touching those machines, more than anything else, in the controversy to move attention would kick up dust. Nevertheless, I share Macalintal's concern that the automation of the 2010 elections is impacted by the failure of all the items to qualify in full, even as the remaining machines continue to gather dust in the budget.

Maribojoc

Human Face

Ma. Carer P. Dayo

IT IS NOT VERY OFTEN THAT ONE GETS OUT of the city to find and experience the pristine and the preserved. Last week, I was in Maribojoc in the Bohol province because of friends' invitation to enjoy not just the fiesta but behold its ancient landmarks tied to elaborate legends and "treasures of the past." But a lingering quiet spaces that glide in and out of one's dreams.

While locked now figures big on the town-naming because of the beauties of Tinigdan, the Chocolate Hills and the sun-soaked coves, it has a fairly hidden quest that could draw a different breed of visitors, explorers who are drawn to paths less traveled. Like myself. Maribojoc has such special places.

The forest is only a 30-minute drive from Tagbilaran, the Bingag-Hatton hunting ranch which was over-often only two rounds. The town's quiet was painted with people for the first few days. My photos of the inhabiting treated came out in the increase the town and its people. Who are these people? Why do we know what? The host came for via Indonesia (with authors speaking in Bahasa). This was because this time, only Boholeos and staffs in Bohol could have cable TV pay-per-view. Obviously, so people could watch the fights.

Maribojoc couldn't get it for by its poor economic state if it would pay the cable company like it did for the past bouts. In whose would the last pullet go? Mayor Leandro "Jun" Fusaro Jr. for Filipino Boxing Federation?

This is the little house I had met many years ago first. I do not remember where or how). He was a Catholic priest. He then became a ranking member of the New People's Army. He was arrested and released by the Aquino government. Many believed he would finish him off. Four comrades who were arrested with him were summarily executed, leaving him the only survivor. He was in prison for several years and was released during the Aquino presidency.

He worked in governance for many years, his last job being as chief of staff of the anti-terrorism branch of Senator Ciriaco Ruiz Jr. Ocampo.

The details of Fusaro's life—story deserves a separate telling some other time.

Now back in the town of his birth, Fusaro, 65, married, with children and grandchildren, is living out his life experiences as former priest, communist rebel, NGO worker and public servant in his chosen town. Coming from a prominent family of Maribojoc, the home-coming Fusaro was as mayor by a landslide in 2007.

Maribojoc has a population of only 38,000. Many are into farming and fishing. It has its deep forests and hunting areas. It has its beaches at the bottom of the river. Its centuries-old Punta Cruz underscores by the sea, and beside it, the wooden cross planted by Italian navigator Pigafetta. The anchored, national historical markers will be inaugurated on the same day as the 400th birthday of Juan Sopoc, the film "Lapulapu in Maribojoc" starring the late Fernando Poe Jr. was filmed here.

The spiritual life of Maribojoc is more deeply centered to the limestone church with unusually pure white coral stones. Its priest is Fr. Ed Inting, who is nicknamed "Inting." Inting hosts, people dance the Inting Inting to seek the intercession of the Spanish Dominican saint who was a great missionary in his time. Devotees I joined in the revelry made the planting and earlier, the floral procession of fishing boats—not to the open sea and I got my prom all wet.

But to go deeper into the heart of this place, one must dwell the hardy folk who are working hard to move the town into the future while preserving its natural heritage. Many an application for quarrying, mining and fishpond permit has the mayor rejected if they looked like threats to the environment.

And as to the blue and green spaces I mentioned earlier, Maribojoc still has some of the biggest mangrove areas in this eastern frontier is an endorsement. Among the banks of the Abatan River (which runs through four towns) are thick coves of mangroves and mangrove apples. Beside a mangrove apple of wildlife. Mahi-mahi and Japanese fish. Even a cousin of the mayor's is one of this habitat as "a couple of fish grace dishes."

Pls. called on the Abatan River to the afternoon with the mayor and Jun and I had our meals to accompany us. It rains point, we transferred from the raft to a tiny house and paddled quietly into the smaller inlets under a canopy of leaves. I thought of the days when I was a child and read Jose Rizal's "Noli Me Tangere" and "El Filibusterismo" and Dr. Joseph Conrad's novel. For me, this was the next best thing to sailing on the Amazon, minus the anacondas.

Cooper Smoked it, a journalist who was based in Bohol for several years, is back in the province to help jumpstart the ecotourism program. The kind of tourism is not for everyone, he said. No disappointment here like in Subic. Just the green at least for sailors, kayakers, wildlife watchers, fishers, and birders.

I visited another mangrove area (back with 2) species of trees and with a half-kilometer board with that leads to an islet planted to coconuts and with a good view of the sea. This serves as camping area. Its owner is a retired teacher, Ma. Victoria Mangrove Association. I also visited a farmers' group that practices organic farming.

I stayed in a bed and breakfast place with a breathtaking view of the mountains in the distance. The sun and moon rise from the same harbor and the always dozen of a band in the river.

For inquiries related to Maribojoc, write to MBojoc.tourism@yahoo.com.

Send feedback to newsph@gmail.com.

Department of Finance debunks Rizal

The Long View

Manuel L. Quezon III

THE "GREAT FILIPINO NOVEL"—WHAT IS IT? Does it exist? Can it be written?—is a question that often absorbs the literary minds. The effort to, at some point or another, have had a tangible expression that proves the power of the novel, because an era, by law, required to read two novels, Rizal's "Noli Me Tangere" and "El Filibusterismo."

That law was due to Jose P. Laurel and Claro M. Recto who battled against those who wanted that the proposed law was divisive and secondary impact. But on Catholics (the hierarchy of the Catholic Church had issued pastoral letters denouncing the proposed law). The public debate became so heavy-some that a new point Francisco "Soc" Rodrigo proposed building Senate debates on the issue behind closed doors.

The Bingaya, BA 1425 or the Rizal Law instituted a policy statement now being contradicted by the Department of Finance.

Our republic, until recently adopted the policy put forward by the Florence Agreement of allowing the duty-free importation of books. Senator Jose Paulino Leviste Jr., in a letter to the President, asking her to rescind book duties, summarized the agreement's objectives as follows: "The treaty's goal is not merely to promote the charitable distribution of books so as to simply allow individuals who had purchased books abroad to be able to bring them home duty-free... Rather, the purpose of the Florence Agreement is to spread knowledge and ideas across national boundaries through books to as many people as possible, whether as an end in itself, by trade and commerce in line with the market philosophy of the Free World since ... World War II."

But last April, the DOF, in league with the Bureau of Customs, decided it could stand an international agreement and on behalf for the dubious, fiscal justification of taxing books.

This was an exercise in being penny wise and pound foolish. Consider that even as the DOF tied up bureaucrats in re-imagining the Florence Agreement, it continued to allow the Bureau of Customs the infinitely larger tax collections on imported oil. From 1997 to 2008, official records show, the duty demand for oil dropped 12.6 percent; and yet the economy was expanded at growing 4.4 percent a year and vehicle registrations 5.5 percent. The result? It's not that oil consumption fell, it's that most oil was smuggled in, resulting in billions of losses to the state of P92.2 billion. In comparison, the country imports about 80,000 books a year.

It's not, books are an easier target, and book lovers are apparently politically inconsequential. Which helps explain why according to Locsin, the DOF can adopt an extremely imperious attitude to attack the rule of law.

"The DOF," he explained, "(in adopting the position that imported books which were to be sold and traded were not entitled to the duty free privileges granted by the Florence Agreement and the Nairobi Protocol)... said that half a century of policy and practice must yield to the modus vivendi of its legal department when, in a flash of inspiration—to ally imaginative hardening on dubious—it devised a criterion in which all books imported for sale should be taxed. Neither occupied at the time, it said the DOF can run against the state, citing no authority or the treaty because, in law, both can run against the state. What the DOF really meant to involve is the outdated, not to say obnoxious, principle that the state 'like king, can do no wrong.'"

Furthermore, the DOF "has arrogated unto itself the sometimes, that is, unconstitutional, power to regulate if not censor books by duties and customs—a power that runs nowhere in the sunshine of our governance."

And this is why I have to wonder if the Rizal Law is now liable to legal challenge. If the Florence Agreement has been in place, for an, since 1952, and it can be modified at a whim, then who is to say that the Rizal Law—passed in 1956, that is, after the agreement—remains inviolate? Or, if DOF can unilaterally abrogate treaties and international conventions, how is interpretation can overrun existing legislation.

Finance Undersecretary Estela V. Salas has been quoted as saying that passing "such a law [Rizal Law] now economically disqualified from national customs duties. At last, Customs Deputy Commissioner Alexander Arevalo suggested, readers can direct themselves into the mercantile outrages by purchasing the "paperback edition" of books, and the customs can Higher Education to declare, set aside P-B least, individual titles as "educational, inflated, scientific, historical or cultural" books.

Consider the suppurious mentality at work here. Filipinos are offended if the Rizal Law's requirement that the book's novels are educational, because now, the bureaucrats of "Bob Me Tanguay," to be definitive, a new educational material because it is an imported novel... unless a specific exemption is obtained. Rizal, the novel, is apparently not enough.

It would seem logical that the Knights of Rizal and the Ateneo Professor Commission on can be its mission to this cause. That the head of the Knights of Rizal is our ambassador to the United Nations should be noted. Similarly, the Commission on Higher Education is declare, set aside P-B least, individual titles as "educational, inflated, scientific, historical or cultural" books.

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Cheap campaigns

ELECTIONS IN OUR COUNTRY HAVE BECOME EXPENSIVE and wasteful exercises. Numerous trees are cut down so that useless campaign posters and pamphlets can be printed. Limited non-renewable fuels are used up to run chartered planes and helicopters for campaign tours. Expensive television and radio air time are bought to decorate irrelevant campaign jingles. Taxpayers' money is stolen to either fund or pay back. (with huge interests) the donations that...

Young Blood

Cheerine Ee

We seem to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twenty-something mid below.—Ed.

It is outright ridiculous and illegal for the government to allow all these huge expenditures by paying campaign spending limits of measly executive amounts. For instance, each senatorial candidate is allowed to spend as much as P10.5 million for his campaign. Simple math tells us that with a monthly salary of roughly P45,000, there is no way a senator can legally earn back his cost/ time what he spent during the campaign. What more the other candidates who go over the limit.

Of course, politicians always claim that most of their campaign money came from donations of "generous" and "supportive" friends. More often than not, these donors are businessmen (and in some cases these businessmen happen to be the candidates themselves).

So what could be their reason for being so generous as to give away millions of pesos to their "friends"? It does not take a genius to answer that question.

Running winning campaign practices is no country. I dare say that the few honest Filipinos who truly want to serve their countrymen will have a very hard time staying honest while in office (assuming they do win, which is most likely because of expensive campaigns). This is because of what I would call a domino effect.

When people who truly wish to serve their country run for office, they need money to launch the kind of campaign that would help them win. To finance such a campaign, they need the support of "friends." But since they are not anxious of free, their "friends" will in turn seek their support for some businesses or projects. In business terms, they want a return on their investment. At first, the elected official may refuse and say no, but unless he is planning not to run for public office again, he will eventually have to return the favor. In this way he is not doing it for himself, but he is still making for his "friends" and therefore he is corrupt.

He can't have such public favors made to be the opinion that gobbles them up. Letting candidates spend for their political campaign much more than what they can expect to earn legally is an invitation to graft and corruption.

In order to stop current wasteful campaign practices, why don't we bring down the campaign spending limits for each candidate to, say, one-half or one-fourth of the total compensation he will get for the new term in the office he is seeking? For a senator whose full term lasts six years, the limit would be about P3.24 million, way below the present P105 million a senatorial candidate is allowed to spend legally.

This may sound silly to some people, but I think a measure of candidates' qualifications is how much they can spend with their amount. For who really believes that a candidate's credentials, moral character and vision can be found or even fairly deduced from the posters, pamphlets, tarpaulins, T-shirts, TV commercials, radio commercials, promotional shows and other campaign gimmicks that he spends a fortune on? As far as I can see, these are the types of expenses that, if all the point is that the more a candidate splurges, the more he is prone to corruption.

What the voters need is information that will help them understand the beliefs, values, opinions, attitudes and leadership styles of the candidates. Where can they get that? If politicians should be able to run campaigns, lend and postpone affairs that they have been in past elections, the voters will turn to the mass media for information. Then television and radio debates will attract bigger audiences and thus become profitable undertakings that media organizations will willingly schedule during prime time.

Of course, this is just a suggestion. It is a luxury, since anyone can be set up in places and other public places in an live or replay the debates. It shouldn't be very difficult to find a company to sponsor such events since they present a good opportunity to promote their products or services. In other words, the candidates themselves can put up the money. I dread P50,000? for the purpose.

Another suggestion that can be tapped for an information campaign is the Web. Candidates can write down their credentials, their plans and their platforms of government in their websites. They can even set up forums on the Web where the electorate can ask questions.

These are some of the ways I think some efficient campaign channels that candidates for public office can use. I am sure there are other options out there. But the important thing is to set a reasonable limit for campaign expenses in order to level the playing field. Then we will see honest, dedicated and visionary leaders being elected to various positions. Even the president chosen to be mayor-council member.

Cheerine U. Ee, 23, is an entrepreneur.

In The News

Rodolfo "Jun" Locsin Jr.

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ELEN FERNANDO
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A passion to serve

LETTERS

THE ISSUE AS TO WHO SHOULD BE OUR next president (one 2010 should be of great concern to us if we want our nation to survive the worsening moral degradation. A president, God-inclined, a highly ambitious for some reason(s) of his own. It is his inner motivation, not his public pronouncements, that makes him truly worthy of serving as president.

One desirable trait of a good leader is the humility to admit mistakes, with the magnanimity to make amends. He is open to change if it can lead to something better. He is principle-centered, ad by the situation to rule but by the passion to serve. He is not possessed by the greed for power. He is fully aware how power can corrupt and how corruption can destroy the image of a nation—to the detriment and disappointment of the millions of good and honest citizens.

More than the capability to lead the nation in time of crisis is a strong leader, he can inspire confidence and trust from his followers because of his credibility. Above all, he is clean. His integrity is beyond question, like commands the respect of both friends and foes alike. Such a morally driven individual has the making of a truly worthy president. God bless him if he end by raises in his name our own president.

—PRISCILLA J. ESPALDON,
81-C Cupid corner St., Ocampo City *2000

Why Congress, Manny? Run for mayor instead

MANNY PACQUIAO IS HONORED LEFT AND right, and well he should be because he has very again raised our spirits and our national pride. We are since Ramon Magsaysay has done this. I am old enough to have witnessed the massive awards that followed Magsaysay wherever he went.

But Pacquiao, more than anyone, knows that this will not last forever. There he stops fighting, maybe in two or three years, things will begin to change. Even his value as a product endorsers will also begin to wane. That is, if the romance of his career is to be just a boxing hero, or even a sports legend.

I have this feeling, however, that he is destined for greater things, because I do not think that this gift of great boxing skills was given to him just to make him rich.

When he was introduced, in his last fight, as coming from barangay, he sent a clear signal that he has been nominated to run for Congress. What a pity. The work in Congress is not his cup o' cappuccino. The house is not in the title but in the quality and competence with which he carries it down.

Manny should resist the temptation. I don't think this is what the Lord wants him to do. In short, he should try that. If he believes that his future is in public service, he should run for mayor of Gen. Santos City. It is an office so desirable as that of a congressman. What is needed is intelligence, executive ability, leadership and compassion for the poor, all of which he already has. Manny should put some of his money into a trust fund, using the proceeds to spend for what his constituents will need—but not in cash. The three most important areas closest to the heart of the poor are health, social programs, access to health services and education. There are many simple ways of doing these three and they are not expensive. What Manny will in effect be doing is building monuments in the hearts of his constituents. These families will forever be loyal to him. This is the greatest present he can give, likewise: To raise the quality of life of his people and to give them hope for a better future, not through handouts but by giving them back their dignity. There is no better present than this.

Oh, and there is one this last final, serious he does this, his memory will stay with him.

—MARIO C. NERI, Barcelona Vill., Q.C.

GSIS pensioners RP's highest-earning retirees

THIS IS IN REPLY TO RAQUEL A. AZURIN'S letter, which was published last May 4 in the Inquirer.

In her letter, Ms. Azurin raised two concerns: one concerning the suspension of her monthly pension due to her non-renewal of active status, and second, the increase in basic monthly pension for pensioners of the Government Service Insurance System.

As per our records, Ms. Azurin's monthly pension was never suspended and all pension benefits due her had been credited to her eCard Plus.

On the second issue, we want to emphasize that the GSIS is the only pension system that has managed to increase its monthly pensions/benefits in the last seven years.

The GSIS has granted a total pension increase of approximately 64 percent since 2001, the highest and most consistent pension increase ever in the country. Consequently, our pensioners remain the highest earning retirees in the country to date.

—ELLA E. VALENCIANO, vice president, Public Relations and Communications Office, Government Service Insurance System

INQUIRER Southern Luzon
Editor Jon Bandayrel
Bureau Chief Florante G. Salvadores

In 'Pahiyas,' procession route matters

By Cecilio T. Mallari Jr.
Lucban, Quezon

FOR PEOPLE LIVING ALONG THE SHORT STRETCH OF ANCINTO Street west of the Saint Louis of Toulouse Church in Lucban, Quezon, the annual "Pahiyas" festival in honor of San Isidro de Labrador on May 15 is a much-awaited event.

"The last time the Pahiyas route passed our street was in 2004. So we're all excited. The whole neighborhood is busy preparing 'kiping' and other traditional décor items that will adorn our houses," said Myrah Villaverde, Barangay 4 day care teacher.

The frenzy of preparations for the popular harvest festival, a form of thanksgiving to the farmers' patron saint for a bountiful harvest, started as early as February according to Villaverde.

Every year, the route of the procession changes to give other houses the chance to participate and showcase their decorations. Residents believe that houses along the route will receive special blessings in the coming year.

A week before the Pahiyas, Villaverde's relatives put up bamboo frames in front of their two-story house as part of an elaborate design sketched on bond paper.

"We will cover the façade of the house with multicolored *kiping* with Mount Banahaw in the route theme," said Myrah's friend Rogenlog, who is in charge of the decoration.

Centerpiece

Kiping, the colorful rice-based wafer, has long been the centerpiece of the festival that is almost synonymous with the Mayflower fiesta.

The wafer is meticulously strung together and arranged in an explosion of brilliant colors to charm all sorts of shapes—from *x*-shaped dolls, locally called "orangis," to different exquisite flower designs.

According to local history, the present-day *kiping* is a concoction derived from Mexico's *mano* by a local named Juan Suarez who brought it from a trading ship aboard a galleon in the company of a Spanish military officer in 1754.

The making of the traditional kiping has been passed from one generation to the next among Lucban women, who learned from his ancestors. I used to help her when I was still a little girl. The process has remained the same all these years," said Melchora Macaraeg, 81.

Bueno Villalon, 70, remembers helping her grandmother make kiping as a tiracle 4 pupil.

"Back then, a piece of kiping only cost five centavos. Now, it's P6 apiece at the market during festival time," she said.

Villalon, a noted strategic maker and famous chef of Lucban's dishes, is busy preparing 13 pieces of indigenous chandeliers, with rose and orchid-shaped kiping, as the centerpiece of this year's festival.

The work was commissioned by a rich businessman for P1,500 per arrange.

With her strip fingers, Villalon transforms the freshly made wafer into exquisite colorful orchids and roses tied together by thin wires.

"Before, I used to hand-sew every fold of the flower. Now, I just staple them," she said.

Villalon said her children already know the secrets of her *kiping*-making trade and techniques. "They will be the one to continue the family tradition," she added.

Commercialized

With the prohibitive cost of natural *kiping*, some residents over the church-tolow houses are now often doing the festival route, use artificial décor that requires only good storage and cleaning.

MULTICOLORED "kiping" are strung together into the chandelier like "orangis" with dried "pulay" stalks as added indigenous decoration material.

A two-story house usually needs a thousand *kiping*.

Marasigan recalls that in the past, people used to decorate their houses with fresh farm harvest, "camote" and homemade *kiping*.

"The rich also adorn their houses with silver-trussed pig," she said.

She lamented how big businesses from Manila have turned the feast into a publicity show.

"The real intention behind the tradition is slowly being forgotten. It's now heavily commercialized. The people just buy items for decoration. That's not the way to thank San Isidro," Marasigan said.

In order to preserve the tradition, the festival committee encourages residents to use farm and other native products, offering cash prizes as incentives. Grand prize for the Gerard Pahiyas is P100,000, the biggest pot in the festival history.

The contest will be extended up to midnight of May 15 to give house owners the chance to display their lighted artings.

As the festival approaches, all streets along the procession route have already been swallowed by a sea of stalls advertising assorted products and services.

And with political season heating up for the 2010 elections, streamers and campaign spreads competing the names of local and national politicians are found in almost every conspicuous, strategic spot.

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"KIPING" makers evenly spread colored rice paste over a "balat" leaf, which they will steam for a couple of minutes.

Across the NATION

Sulu gov survives bomb attack; 6 hurt

ZAMBOANGA CITY—A BOMB APPARENTLY INtended for Sulu Gov. Abdulakar Tan went off and missed its target but injured at least six people yesterday in a town in Sulu, officials said.

The explosion took place at about 12:30 p.m. and narrowly missed Tan's vehicle, according to the officials.

Chief Supt. Hensak Adiosmi, Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) police chief, said the bomb was planted about 70 meters from the Sulu provincial capitol in Patikul town.

He said it was placed in a motorcycle, which was parked along Tan's usual exit route from the capitol.

Based on initial investigations conducted by the Explosives and Ordinance Division in Sulu, Adiosmi said the bomb was remotely detonated.

Adiosmi said Tan and the acting police chief of Sulu (the chief had been killed in a clash on Thursday) had just finished a meeting and were leaving the capitol when the explosion took place.

He said another car took a direct hit from the explosion, but the vehicle that Tan used suffered minor damages.

Tan, according to Adiosmi, was unharmed but several of his escorts and another police officer were injured.

He identified the wounded police officers as SPO1 Abdulrajan Jedanez, SPO1 Ruben Hinal-lan and PO2 Omar Ignasin.

Some of the injured have not been identified as of yesterday afternoon.

Adiosmi said two soldiers were also reportedly wounded in the explosion, which was "intended for the governor." The police officer, however, could not identify the soldiers yet.

Adiosmi said authorities were still clueless on why or what group was behind the attack.

He said, however, that the attack had the same "patterns and trademarks" as that which killed Muhaimin Alihar, Basilan congressman who died in a Metro Manila hospital after suffering serious injuries in a bomb explosion as he started his car as a driveway of the House of Representatives.

The bomb that killed Alihar was also placed in a motorcycle.

Tan heads the Task Force ZDC, which supervises the military operation against Abu Sayyaf bandits keeping Indian hostage Eugenio Vagni, a Red Cross worker, as hostage.

Tan said among those wounded was a mayor but he did not identify who it was.

"I am OK, except for my guards, a mayor and three cops," he said.

He said those who were injured were seated in the right side of the two service vehicles caught in the explosion.

"I am okay but my shoes were damaged," Tan told the Inquirer by phone.

"The bomb was intended for me but if you'll ask me what's the reason and who may be behind this, I cannot tell you and I cannot say anything. I will leave it all to the police to investigate," he said. —Jude Mirpuris, Inquirer Mindanao

"I am OK, but my shoes were damaged..."

A FARMER hangs tobacco leaves to dry at a farm in Pikasang, Pangasinan. (GREG BAUTISTA)

Tobacco farmers fret over excise taxes

GAMDON CITY—SUMMER HARS HAVE destroyed millions of pesos of tobacco leaves in this town, but farmers are not forcing over this as they have made money from their first cropping at the start of the year.

What is making farmers giddy is the diminishing returns of their tobacco excise tax fund, which was meant to help them in the lean months.

Ferdinand Fuma, head of the Federation of Planting Barangay in Boom Sur, said farmers' shares in tobacco excise tax fund are diminishing.

The law on tobacco excise tax (Republic Act 7171) mandates that tobacco-producing provinces shall get a 15 percent share from tobacco excise taxes collected by the Bureau of Internal Revenue.

According to the Department of Budget and Management, the tobacco excise tax fund for Virginia tobacco-producing towns in Boom Sur, La Union, Boom Norte and Abra has been decreasing dramatically since 2006 despite bumper harvests.

In 2005, the fund was P2.12 billion but it went down to P677 million in 2006. In 2007, it decreased further to P537 million.

"The government cannot give an explanation about it," Fuma said. "What we know is that the estimated BA 7171 fund for this year is P6 billion."

To help tobacco farmers, the Bill said the excise tax revenues should be based on the actual amount of excise taxes collected annually from locally manufactured Virginia cigarettes.

The Bill said this compensation would help tobacco farmers get what is due them.

According to the National Tobacco Administration, the second district of Boom Sur has the biggest production of Virginia tobacco this year in 11,876.4 metric tons (MT).

The district also produced 210.8 MT of burley and 1,650 MT of native tobacco. The current area spanned by the high buying prices of tobacco. Frank Cimaris, Inquirer Northern Luzon

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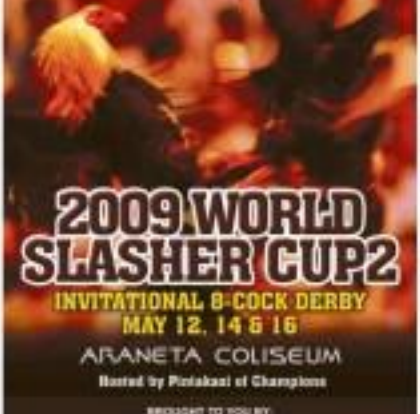

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Use of pesticide in suicides alarms execs in Benguet

LA TRINIDAD, BENGUET—GOVERNMENT and health officials have expressed alarm over the increase in the number of suicides using pesticides in Benguet.

Gov. Nestor Fongwan has formed a task force to look into the causes of the suicides and determine if the widespread use of chemical farm inputs in the province's vegetable farms was related to it.

"We are validating the reasons behind the suicides and the role of pesticides, if any," he said here on Tuesday.

In 2008, the province recorded 57 suicides. Most victims were aged 17 to 28. From January to April this year, 20 suicides were already recorded, according to Dr. Felizian Pick, provincial health officer.

He said the statistics all named pesticides, raising speculation that the use and availability of these chemicals in the province's farms could have encouraged the victims.

But he could not readily say if the suicides were farmers or users of pesticides. His office has yet to complete the profiling of the victims.

But experts and pesticide distributors brushed aside insinuations that the presence of chemical farm inputs could have helped trigger the suicides.

Napoleon Saavedra, spokesperson of the Pest Management Council of the Philippines (PMCP), said social and cultural factors could have caused the suicides and the use of pesticides was merely incidental.

"To say pesticide is a major factor in the incidents reported would be too unfair. It is a very disputable presumption," he said.

Pesticide companies and pest scientists are pushing for an aggressive promotion of science-based agriculture to counter what they claim is negative publicity and widespread misinformation about the use of pesticides.

The move, according to the PMCP, is meant to boost the role played by crop protection and crop protection products in the government's bid to make food agriculture globally competitive.

In a declaration issued last week at the end of its 45th anniversary celebration and scientific convention here, the PMCP said recent issues on food safety and environmental degradation had placed pesticides in a bad light. —Bobour Carino, Inquirer Northern Luzon

WIDENT ruins and flooding won't stop people, like this boy selling sampaguita flowers, from their daily chores in Legazpi City. (JOVEN CAL/KAMI/INQUIRER SOUTHERN LUZON)

Climate change forcing new strategies in Albay

LEGAZPI CITY—DISASTER management officials in Albay are adopting new strategies to meet the challenges of climate change and keep a zero-casualty record which was achieved when Typhoon Reming slammed into the Bicol region.

Gov. Joey Sarte Salceda has instructed Cedric Daep, Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council (PDCC) chief and head of the Albay Provincial Safety and Emergency Management Office (Apsemo), to make adjustments to disaster preparedness strategies, especially community-based evacuation plans.

Salceda said there was a need to prepare for a longer rainy season, with the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa)'s prediction that its seven months of rains this year compared to only four to six months in previous years.

"This means more lives on landslides than floods and then lahar," he said, adding that the PDCC is coming up with the new strategies as soon as it finalizes plans.

The governor said there was a need for enhanced preparedness at the province's west coast, with rain typhoons now coming from the South China Sea.

Salceda said a wet summer, even without La Niña, and rain-typhoons from the western seaboard are increasing signs of climate change. Roy M. Pinedi, Inquirer Southern Luzon

SPORTS
Editor Tobbie C. Hernandez • Assistant Editor Francis T.J. Ochoa
E-mail: sports@inquirer.com.ph
Website: www.inquirer.net/sports

Ring Magazine names Pacquiao Fighter of Decade

PHILIPPINE WORLD CHAMPION MANNY PACQUIAO HAS BEEN NAMED Fighter of the Decade by Ring Magazine. Pacquiao, who demolished Ricky "Hitman" Hatton in four rounds to win the Britain's 140-lb light welterweight title on May 2 in Las Vegas, was named ahead of Floyd Mayweather Jr. by the sport's author, Michael Rosenthal.

3-2 LEADS

Celtics, Lakers cream foes

BOSTON—THE BOSTON CELTICS STORMED past the Orlando Magic, 92-80, on Tuesday and took a 3-2 lead in their NBA Eastern Conference semifinals.

Ray Allen's seven-pointer with 1:28 left gave Boston its first lead since the opening minutes.

A lackluster 36 minutes left Boston trailing by 14 points without that nine minutes replay. The Celtics still trailed by 1:9 with 5:08 left.

Stephen Marbury scored all his 12 points in the final quarter. Rod Pierce had 19 points, nine rebounds and seven assists.

"We'll always come in getting it and leaving the heart of a champion," Pierce said.

Orlando needs to win in Game 6 on Thursday to force a Game 7 in Boston.

In Los Angeles, the team bounced back from their Game 4 flop, routing Houston, 113-98, to also take a 3-2 lead in the Western Conference.

The top-seeded Lakers did everything they didn't do in Sunday's loss in Houston—they shot, rebounded and played tight defense on Houston's trouble lineup.

On Sunday the Lakers trailed by 29 points. On Tuesday night, they had a 29-point lead by late in the second quarter. The Lakers rose atop the series Thursday in Houston.

"We've got to stay focused and understand that the effort we gave tonight is not going to be enough on Thursday," Bryant said. /AP

Painters, Texters turn back foes

By Hyacinth B. Cuerdo

JAI LOUIS SCORED 27 POINTS ON top of 11 rebounds while four-loads scored in wide digits as Rain or Shine dumped Barako Bull, 110-87, last night to embarrass its bid for spot-at-eight Final Four slot in the Metrolite 09th Fiesta Cup at the Cuneta Astrodome.

The Gerry Leoro again made a comeback portrait inside the final minute that broke the last tie at 87 and boosted the Elasto Painters to their third straight win and an 8-3 record for solo second place. Red Bull fell to 2-11.

"I knew was pressure before the game," said Bulls at Shine coach Caloy Garcia. "But's not easy to bring in this position [solo second place]."

GAME TODAY
(Ynares Arena, Pasig)
1 p.m.—Welcoat vs Air Love

In the second game, Jimmy Alapag scored 16 of his 18 points after the third quarter and then had a key rebound and assist to help Talk N text hold off stubborn Burger King, 120-119 in double-overtime.

With his team up by just two, Alapag collected a rare by Sidanian Cardona and to save rookie-led import Rudolph Bell for a short-rank that tied the game, 110-110, with 12.9 ticks remaining.

Talk N Text hope in bid for an outright semifinal slot alive by ousting Burger King at 7-6.

The scores:

**GAME IN PHOTOS (1st—Laure 27; Ilogon 15; Mercado 11; Cardona 10; Ilogon 9; Ilogon 8; Ilogon 7; Ilogon 6; Ilogon 5; Ilogon 4; Ilogon 3; Ilogon 2; Ilogon 1; Ilogon 0; Ilogon 0; Ilogon 0

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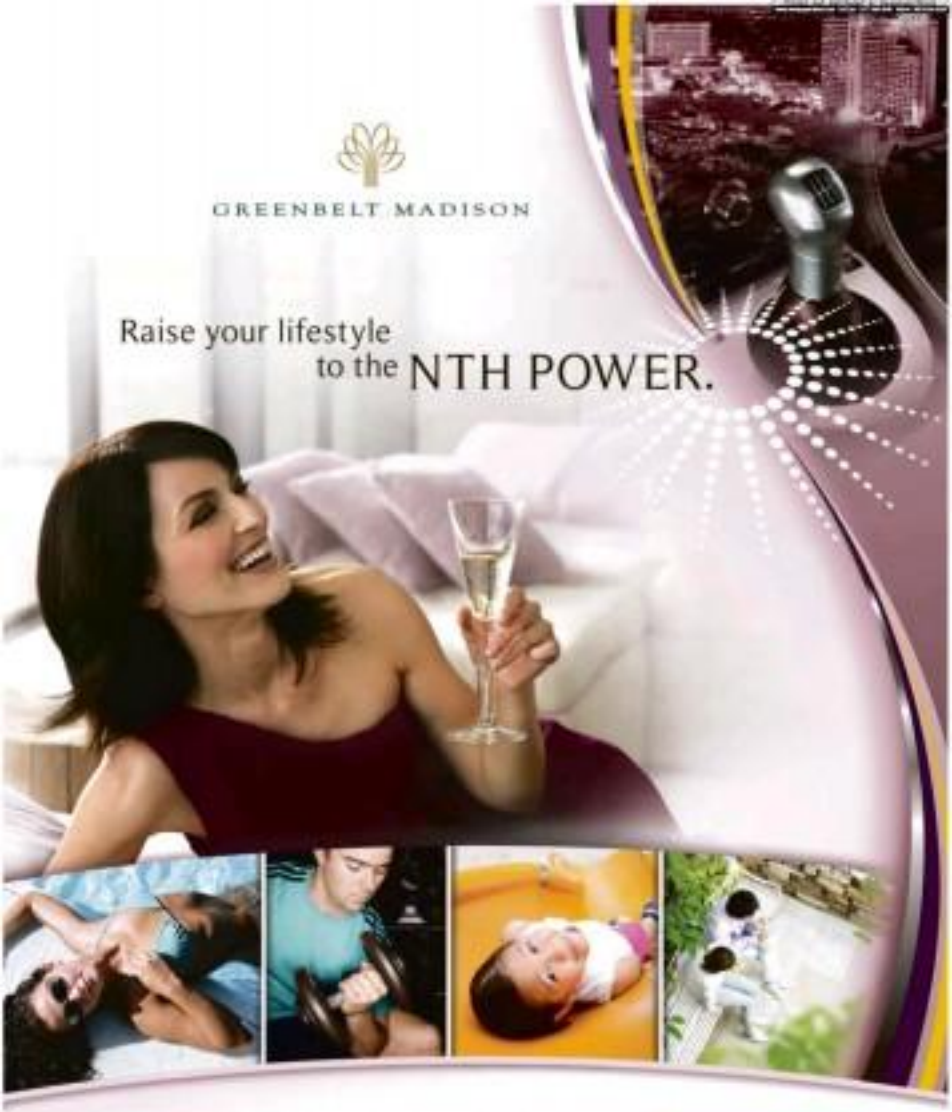

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Cops link woman's murder to debts

Text messages in victim's phone include threats from creditors

By DJ Yap

THE PASIG POLICE SAID MONEY MATTERS COULD BE THE motive behind the killing of a 40-year-old executive who was shot in cold blood by a motorcycle-riding gunman on Tuesday at a busy intersection in Pasig City.

Investigators probing the death of Liberty Lirasang, sales manager of the information technology firm Atari Innovation Technologies Inc., said some of her coworkers had revealed that she was having financial troubles before her brutal killing.

"We learned from her coworkers that she had a lot of debts to some individuals. This could be the motive, although we are also looking at other angles," said SPO4 Roberto Garcia, one of the investigators.

SPO1 Rogelio Bahasar said Lirasang's daughter and her secretary admitted that it was "possible" Lirasang's debts had been the motive behind her killing. Reached by phone, Lirasang's secretary said they were under instruction not to talk to media about the case.

The Pasig police have in their possession three of Lirasang's cell phones, Bahasar said.

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Tinga stops eviction of Taguig settlers

By Alimen M. Lopez

THE TAGUIG CITY GOVERNMENT yesterday stopped the eviction of around 1,000 families from a military-owned property in Western Bicutan which is considered part of the Libingan ng mga Bayani historical Shrine.

Mayor Freddie Tinga, who visited the site, asked Task Force Banner head Col. Alexiel Cruz, to order it not to demolish the houses of residents in Sitio Maligaya, Mangaan and parts of Calzadores Village and Sanitary because they had nowhere to go.

At around 8 a.m. yesterday, members of the Philippine Army arrived in the area to enforce a May 7 memorandum issued by task group adjutant Lt. Col. Aida Fangalib ordering the residents to voluntarily demolish their houses.

The soldiers started tearing down the structures but they stopped when Tinga arrived in the area.

A resident identified as Jovelyn de la Cruz, 20, claimed he sustained injuries after soldiers hit him on the face.

However, a check with Sup. Patricio Macdinal of the Taguig police community precinct 1 showed that no one was injured during the demolition operations.

The city government earlier said it was not responsible for finding a relocation site for the illegal settlers.

Tinga, however, ordered the construction of a tugging area to temporarily house the displaced families. He also ordered that they be provided with food and other necessities.

Taguig social welfare head Elsa Joslan said the city government would continue to extend help to the affected families, adding that they should avoid themselves of the city government's housing program.

On Tuesday, a group of settlers went to the mayor to oppose the demolition order figured in a shootout with soldiers. The soldiers later left but vowed to return.

Wilma Sapendes, secretary general of Bagkahulugang Barikadang Sitio Maligaya Inc., earlier said they would not leave their houses until the soldiers somehow show a court order.

With Rachel Miranda

METROBRIEFS

Bonus for workers

TAGUIG Mayor Sigfrido Tinga has announced the release of a 13th-month bonus for the city hall's 1,172 employees. In a statement sent to the Inquirer yesterday, Tinga said he has ordered the concerned offices to facilitate the early release of the employee bonus so as to be amply prepared with enough funds for their children's tuition and miscellaneous expenses this coming school year. The bonus is equivalent to one-half of the employees' monthly salary. On top of this, each of them will also receive a P1,000 clothing allowance, the city council added. At the same time, Tinga has launched a citywide anti-mendicant cleanliness campaign. Lito Sison, chief of the City Personnel and Vocational Services Office and head of the campaign, said the program would have the form of a competition with all barangay and barangay Kalusugan officials as active participants.

Maid abducted, freed

A HOUSEMAID of a businessman in Quezon City was allegedly abducted outside a shopping mall in Cainta, Rizal, on Monday although she was released unharmed after several hours, the complaint by her employer at the Quezon City Police District's Criminal Investigation and Detection Unit said. Police chief Supt. Joel Pagdilao said the victim, Jennifer Ilagan, was identified, was kidnapped as she was leaving a department store in the mall. Ilagan told police that the abduction might have been the work of a former political ally who developed a grudge against him after the latter lost in the previous barangay elections.

Nancy C. Carvajal and Erika Calloza

Caregiver gets 40 years for ward's slay

By Tina G. Santos

A MANILA JUDGE YESTERDAY sentenced a caregiver to 40 years in jail for killing his 91-year-old ward five years ago.

Judge Reynaldo Alhambra of the Manila Regional Trial Court Branch 53 imposed the penalty of reclusion perpetua on Gerry Lopez, 40, for the death of Felino Teodoro, a relative of Senator Tito Sotto, on June 21, 2004.

Alhambra also ordered the convict to pay the heirs of Teodoro P175,000 in damages.

In his ruling, the judge gave credence to the testimony of witness Rosalio who testified that between 1 a.m. and 2 a.m. on May 31, 2004, he heard a commotion and loud thuds coming from the victim's unit, which was next to his.

When he went out of his unit and peered into the window of the victim's unit, Rosalio said he saw Lopez holding the arm of the victim who was lying naked on the floor.

He added that he heard the victim tell Lopez: "Maawa ka. Hindi mo magkaanak." (Have pity on me, we're not enemies.)" and "Bitawan ka. Hindi ko sa kaya, pasapin mo na ako." (Here pity on me. I can no longer bear it, kill me now.)"

An autopsy conducted on the victim showed that he died of multiple traumatic injuries to the body.

The victim also suffered bruises, cuts and bumps all over his body which could have been caused by someone hitting him with a blunt object or instrument, the court said.

Lopez had claimed that he was in Dumaguete to buy food for Teodoro at the time the victim was killed. He said that when he came home at around 9 a.m. he found Teodoro already dead.

The judge, however, found his defense, saying that while no one actually saw how the killing was committed by the victim, there was no other person other than the accused who was inside the house just minutes before the victim was killed.

He added that testimonial and documentary evidence proved that the accused committed the crime by taking advantage of his superior strength.

BOMB NEUTRALIZER
A bomb disposal robot system demonstrates how it would get rid of explosives during yesterday's firearms exercise in Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija. AP

Bank files raps vs 2 ex-workers accused of stealing ₱1.8 million from depositors

By Tina G. Santos

TWO FORMER BANK EMPLOYees were charged yesterday by their former employer for allegedly stealing more than P1.8 million from the accounts of several depositors in 2004.

Mitra Ave. San and Ruby Inadan Sa, who used to work at Metrobank's Monumento branch as customer service representatives, were charged at the Manila Regional Trial Court with 47 counts of qualified theft through falsification of commercial documents.

Based on the bank's complaint, the accused—who had access to deposit documents and slip deposits—made some fraudulent withdrawals from the accounts of several depositors by forging their signatures between February to August 2004.

The duo's alleged illegal activities were discovered when Erma Jaime Jimenez, the branch operations officer, saw an unsigned withdrawal slip for P150,000 from the account of Evangeline Ogbac. The slip, however, was not machine-validated.

Jimenez said she was told by its that the bank customer had taken the validated slip with her.

Later on, Gan, acting in the bank customer's behalf, prepared another withdrawal slip which she signed and submitted to the branch to start the transaction, said the complaint.

"Regularized" is the bank's term for its procedure of requiring clients to sign the necessary documents to prove that they had authorized the bank to carry out a specific transaction.

Jimenez, however, said she still had doubts about the transaction, prompting her to ask the bank's Special Audit Department to look into the matter.

In his complaint-affidavit, Senior Tax Auditor Corpuscristo Ledesma said their investigation showed that both respondents conspired in making several unauthorized withdrawals from the accounts of at least nine depositors.

The amounts withdrawn, he added, ranged from P5,000 to P650,000 and totaled P1,835,000.

Another bank employee, Julie Ann Montalbo, claimed she saw how the respondents forged the bank depositors' signatures by copying these from specimen signatures cards. She said both cited school fee not to be taught her mother died.

Gan and Sa, who both denied the charges, were freed by the bank in September 2004.

DID YOU KNOW

V. E. PUBLICO Memorial School in Manila was named after Veterans Pagtar, affiliated association of the 1000 who, after World War II, was appointed city mayor by then President Manuel Quezon. Pagtar held the position for only a year and a half.

Quirl C. Antolihao, Inquirer Research

SKELETAL REMAINS
A pile of bones wrapped in white cloth are stored at the back of a Philippine Marine vehicle was impounded by the police. The soldier's driver, Kazuya Tanino, a Japanese, is being investigated for transporting the skeletal remains of up to 100 dead Japanese soldiers without a permit. AP

Cops link woman's murder to debts

By Jaymee Ann T. Gamil

He added that a check of the text messages to one of the victim's cell phones did not reveal any details if she had been seeing two major firms at least three individuals who wanted her that they would take her to court if she did not pay her debts.

However, only the initials of these individuals were registered in Lizonaga's list of contacts, Bolivar said.

Eastern Police District director, Chief Supt. Luis Calba, said, a more thorough investigation was needed before any conclusion could be reached.

As of yesterday, no suspect has been identified in the shooting which occurred in broad daylight in the busy Ortigas district.

Garcia said the gunwielder then fled inland to cross the from the scene of the crime and had not been able to take a good look at the gunman, although he added he is still hoping more witnesses would turn up to help them come up with a composite sketch of the killer.

Bolivar urged more eyewitnesses to come out and reveal what they saw. He promised that their identities and the information they provide would be kept secret.

A resident of Pasig Millennium Garden on Ruiz's Avenue, Lizonaga died at the Medical City where she was rushed after she sustained fatal bullet wounds at the shooting her white Toyota Rav 4, plate number XPE-377 on Julia Vargas Avenue.

Alex Esperon, a cigarette vendor, said he saw the vehicle slam into the center island of Julia Vargas, and then a man ran away from the scene and sped off on a motorcycle toward C.P. Reed.

It's suicide—NBI

THE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL Bureau of Investigation (NBI) on the death of Tyrus Ebong, wife of former broadcaster Ted Failon, it's suicide.

Ebong had shielded trademarks, according to Dr. Romulo Papa, NBI spokesman.

Papa based his findings on interviews with Ebong's close friends and relatives to whom she confided of her thoughts days and weeks before she died. NBI handlers told the interviewers.

Tyrus Ebong was depressed over financial problems, her close friends and relatives told the NBI.

NBI handwriting experts also found that the controversial note that purportedly asked for her husband's forgiveness was in Tyrus's own handwriting.

There were speculations the note was written by one of the maids to cover up a parricide allegedly committed by Ted Failon.

Failon should now stop worrying that the government is getting back at him for his adverse commentaries against the Arroyo administration.

...

But why is the NBI taking long to come out with its official report on Tyrus's death?

The Bicutan should be placed on the top of NBI Director Nestor Mantaring, who is probably the most intelligent and disciplined officer of the NBI.

A career NBI agent, Mantaring was appointed to the NBI's top post because he was the deputy director of Reynaldo Wycoco who died in office of natural causes.

"Since he was the bureau's No. 2 man, he assumed the top post as OIC [officer-in-charge]. He was eventually appointed director after he functioned as the First Gentleman [Mike Arroyo]," said an NBI agent.

Maintaining is the kind of chief who wants to please everybody: Boss, he doesn't make a stand on controversial issues such as the death of Tyrus Ebong.

Maintaining leaves his subordinates to do their thing. This outside has been construed by some underlings as a license to extort.

One of his favoring subordinates was exposed by some outsiders for shaking down a massage parlor.

...

A multimillion-peso road construction project is going at a snail's pace in Bulacan.

On a stretch between Pandi, Bulacan City and Marilao town, for example, only half of the highway on the Guiguinto and Pandi side is under construction work on the other half where I passed there recently.

What's the project commitment?

B.C. de Leon, Phil. Constructors Office Arroyo's crony who won allegedly laundered in the rigging of bids in which funds assisted road projects.

De Leon's other road project to the country, altogether running to billions of pesos, are also in the same rot as the Bulacan project.

At the rate De Leon's road construction projects are moving they will be finished beyond 2010 when his benefactor no longer exists to influence on the awarding of government contracts.

Oh, am I speaking too soon?

...

Bandanmusang Kaunan Chairman of Haji Mamar Dumpalan's ordinal to hold a warning by the World Health Organization (WHO) in connection with Mexico's Los Angeles as a pandemic may necessitate to upload the swine flu virus has inspired jokes about him.

Here's one of those jokes:

Dumpalan explained he doesn't recognize the WHO as a body.

"I recognize only the NBO (World Boxing Organization), WBC (World Boxing Council) and WBA (World Boxing Association)," he said.

He described the suggestion not to engage in face-to-face kissing of the cheek as "ridiculous." "Hello" alone he doesn't relish the idea of doing it with swine, anyway.

Pope issues call for Palestinian homeland

BETHLEHEM—POPE BENEDICT XVI, standing in the cradle of Christianity, told Palestinians on Wednesday that he supports their quest for a sovereign homeland, offering his strongest public support yet for an independent Palestinian state.

The Pontiff drove in Israel traditional birthplace of Bethlehem, crossing through towering concrete slabs Israel has erected to wall off the West Bank, literally alongside Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, he acknowledged Palestinians' desire for security and self-rule. "The only course is clear: either by some under the Israeli critics who surrounded he failed to adequately express remorse for the Holocaust.

"Mr President, the Holy See supports the right of your people to a sovereign Palestinian homeland in the land of your forefathers, secure and at peace with its neighbors, within internationally-recognized borders," the Pontiff said.

The Pope also called for Palestinian independence when he arrived in Israel on Monday for his high-profile Holy Land pilgrimage. Israel's new Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was in the audience, says the Palestinian aren't ready to rule themselves and so the has resisted international pressure to declare his support for a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

The Pope, who has described himself as a "pilgrim of peace," has been viewed to navigate a host of political land mines as he makes his way through Israel and the West Bank—his first visit to the region as the head of the Roman Catholic church.

On Tuesday the Vatican rallied to his defense, describing him as man of strong anti-Nazi credentials and a peacemaker after critics were angered that he failed to apologize in a speech at Israel's Holocaust memorial for what they see as Catholic indifference during the Nazi genocide. Earlier that day he had visited the bullet-ridden Muslim and Jewish sites in Jerusalem, the Shrine of the Book and the Western Wall.

The Palestinians hoped that the Pontiff's visit would highlight their harsh conditions under Israeli military rule, and Benedict acknowledged their difficulties, but stopped short of naming Israel.

"I know how much you have suffered and continue to suffer as a result of the turmoil that has afflicted this land for decades," he said.

Abbas invoked the economic barrier and the occupation in his greeting to the Pontiff.

"In this Holy Land, the occupation still continues building aggressive walls," Abbas said. "Instead of building the bridge that can link us, they are using the force of occupation to force Muslims and Christians to emigrate."

Israel says it has been building the barrier of concrete slabs and electronic fences, which stretches for hundreds of kilometres along the frontier with the West Bank, to keep out Palestinian militants. AP

PALESTINIAN President Mahmoud Abbas (right), welcomes Pope Benedict XVI (left), at the Palestinian headquarters in the West Bank town of Bethlehem on Wednesday. AP

Palin to publish memoir

NEW YORK—FORMER VICE presidential contender Sarah Palin will publish a memoir to come out in the United States in Spring 2010, the year she is up for re-election as Alaska's governor.

A Palin book has been rumored virtually from the time the 2008 election ended. Although Republicans presidential candidate Sen. John McCain and Palin were soundly beaten by Democrats Barack Obama and Joseph "Biden in November, Palin emerged a favorite among conservatives, an object of tabloid gossip and—as the only candidate in the race who had never written a memoir—a natural for a publishing deal.

"There's been so much written about and spoken about in the mainstream media and in the anonymous blogosphere world, that this will be a wonderful, refreshing chance for me to get to tell my story, that a lot of people have asked about," reflected," Palin said during a brief telephone interview on Tuesday with The Associated Press.

Palin's memoir, currently untitled and to be published by HarperCollins, will cover her personal and political life, from her childhood in Alaska and last year's campaign, in her conservative point of view, the publisher said in a statement Tuesday. Palin, including the pregnancy of her teenage daughter, Bristol Palin, who gave birth to Trig, Piper, Willow and Track, have since ended their relationship. AP

US wins first seat on United Nations rights council

UNITED NATIONS—THE UNITED States won a seat on the UN Human Rights Council for the first time on Tuesday along with four countries accused of serious human rights violations—Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti and Russia.

Former President George W Bush's administration boycotted the council over its repeated criticism of Israel and its refusal to cite Baghdad rights abuses in Sudan and elsewhere.

But the US announced in late March that it would seek to join the council to help make it more effective, reflecting President Barack Obama's desire to ensure a "more robust engagement" with the international body.

Even though the US did not face competition in its regional group for a seat on the 47-member council, it needed to get at least 97 votes—a majority of the 192 UN member states—in a secret ballot. It did far better, winning 167 votes.

"We received 80 percent of the valid votes cast," US Ambassador Susan Rice pointed out after the vote. "And we've gotten off to a very strong start by encouragement for the United States in again play a meaningful leadership role in multilateral organizations including the United Nations on the very vitally important set of issues relating to human rights and democracy."

Rice was asked whether it wasn't impossible for the council to be effective because the US and other members have been accused of failing to respect human rights.

"We certainly share the view that the council has not performed to its potential, but we wouldn't be running if we thought it was impossible," she said. "Obviously there will always be some countries whose conduct and record on human rights is sub-par. We have not been perfect ourselves."

The Human Rights Council was created in March 2006 to replace the UN's widely discredited and highly politicized Human Rights Commission—with the US virtually alone in voting against its creation. AP

Jailed US journalist held secret report on Iraq war

TEHRAN—A JOYFUL ROXANA Saberi on Tuesday thanked those who helped win her release after four months in a Tehran prison. Her lawyer revealed that the American journalist was convicted of spying for the United States in part because she had a copy of a confidential Iranian report on the US war in Iraq.

Saberi, who holds American and Iranian citizenship, had copied the report "out of curiosity" while she worked as a freelance translator for a powerful body connected to Iran's ruling clerics, said the lawyer, Abdolsamad Khorramshahi.

It remained a key part of the prosecution's case against her during her secret, closed-door trial, in mid-April before an Iranian security court, Mikhaeili said. Prosecutors also cited a trip to Israel that Saberi made in 2006, he said. Iran bars its citizens from visiting Israel, an top regional foe of Iran.

Speaking to reporters in Tehran for the first time since her release on Monday, a smiling Saberi said she did not have any specific plans but wanted to spend time with her family. Saberi, who at one point was no longer strike in prison, looked thin but energetic, dressed in a bright blue headscarf, black pants and a black dress.

"I'm of course very happy to be free and to be with my parents again, and I want to thank all the people all over the world—which I've just finding out about—who have helped me. I never knew or not helped me and my family during this period," she said in brief remarks outside her home in south Tehran.

"I don't have any specific plans for the moment, I just want to be with my parents, and my friends and in relax," the 32-year-old said.

Her father said Saberi was catching up on news stories on her detention on the Web as the family prepared to return with her to the US in the coming days.

Saberi's original trial was a swift, single session that her father said lasted only 15 minutes. She didn't have a chance to speak in that trial, and she was sentenced to eight years in prison—drawing an outcry from Washington.

But she spoke in an appeals court on Sunday, explaining her side to the judges, Mikhaeili said. AP

SM DONATES TO PONDONG PINOY

The SM Mall of Asia recently turned over coins gathered from the mall's fountain to Pondong Pinoy. These were coins tossed by shoppers with all their good intentions. Pondong Pinoy will use the coins of hope as part of Pondong Pinoy's programs to help the less fortunate.

His Eminence Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales received a check in the amount of P555,515 for from Mrs. Felicidad Sy, representing the coins gathered from the fountain. Mall of Asia AVP for Operations Steven Tan was also present during the

Every proceeds of the coins that you drop at SM Mall of Asia's fountain goes to the Pondong Pinoy which is a project of His Eminence Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales

The proceeds of the coins gathered from the SM Mall of Asia's fountain are donated to Pondong Pinoy. Above is photos are His Eminence Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales and Mrs. Felicidad Sy

Pondong Pinoy, which was started by Cardinal Rosales, aims to educate poor children, create a new mindset, a new way of becoming, and a new way of living. Some of its programs include the support for women and children in urban poor communities, like Pondong Pinoy Landing Program, a microfinance program for small entrepreneurs and livelihood programs.

WORLD BRIEFS

5 convicted of attack plot

MIAMI—Five men were convicted on Tuesday of plotting to join forces with al-Qaida to destroy Chicago's Sears Tower and bomb FBI offices in hopes of igniting an anti-government insurrection. The jury in Miami acquitted another man of the plot to so-called "Liberty City Six" in the ninth day of deliberations. The most serious of whom are Hatian or have Haitian ancestry, were arrested in June 2006 on charges of plotting terrorism with an undercover FBI informant they believed was from al-Qaida. AP

Car bomb kills 7 Afghans

KABUL—A suicide car bomb exploded outside a United States military base in Afghanistan on Wednesday, killing seven Afghans in the second deadly attack to strike the town of Khost in two days, officials said. The insurgent Taliban movement claimed responsibility for the blast, saying the bomber was one of 20 it let loose in the eastern town, some of whom carried out a series of attacks on Tuesday that killed up to nine Afghans. AFP

Ex-Canada PM denies wrongdoing

TORONTO—Former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney denied on Tuesday any wrongdoing in his dealings with a German army dealer who claims the Canadian leader agreed to take kickbacks from submarine and artillery sales. Mulroney acknowledges he accepted $225,000 Canadian dollars from Karlheinz Schreiber in exchange for promoting a project involving a light armored vehicle factory on behalf of Germany's Thyssen AG, but only after leaving politics. AP

UN asked to probe lawyer's killing

GUATEMALA CITY—A slain lawyer's videotaped and posthumously broadcast accusation that President Alvaro Colom ordered his murder threw Guatemala into an uproar on Sunday and encouraged the government to call for a United Nations agency and the FBI to investigate the killing. Colom vehemently denied the allegations made in a videotape left by lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg, who was shot to death by unidentified assailants while riding his bicycle on Sunday. AP

MMTA MOVIE GUIDE

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The WORLD

Pakistan appeals for aid

PESHAWAR—PAKISTAN FIGHTER jets and attack helicopters pounded Taliban targets in the northwest on Wednesday as President Asif Ali Zardari called for global help to avert a humanitarian catastrophe.

Hundreds of thousands of civilians have fled the punishing offensive in the Swat valley, sweeping Taliban fighters who have terrorised the population in a bloody campaign to enforce sharia law and expand their control.

Terrified residents trapped in Mingora, the district's main town, told AFP by telephone that militants had planted mines and were digging trenches.

"Please, please, please, do not call me again, they will cut my throat and say that I was spying," said one resident contacted by AFP pleading for his name not to be published.

"People are becoming mentally ill, my sons have shut down, children and women are crying, please tell the government to pull us out of here," said a shopkeeper, also on condition of anonymity.

"Just imagine how we are surviving. Forget the lack of electricity and other problems, the Taliban are everywhere and heavy exchanges of fire are routine at night."

Air strikes targeted Taliban strongholds across Swat, which has risk from warring tribesmen [illegible] to a stable of Taliban violence and where ground troops have yet to take control.

Helicopter gunships also swung into action in the neighbouring district of Lower Dir, where the military has been on the offensive since April 26 after Taliban fighters advanced to within 100 kilometres of Islamabad.

Up to 15,000 security forces are taking on about 4,000 well-armed fighters in Swat to what Islamabad says is a battle to "eliminate" Islamist militants, heralded by Washington as the greatest armed threat on the Web.

Military officials said air raids from Mingora had been closed and troops were surrounding the town to prevent militants leaving.

Amjad Ali, a 33-year-old plumber, said he and his five children walked for three days to the Jalozai refugee camp to escape scenes of horror in Mingora, where Taliban were armed with guns, rapier rifles and rocket launchers. AFP

IN THIS ISSUE
- SMC eyes $700M from sale of int'l unit /B3
- San Miguel unit, GSIS forge P3-B property deal /B5

Editor Raul D. Marcelo • Assistant Editor Carrie S. Nariona

BUSINESS

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SMC in Meralco worries Lopez patriarch

San Miguel, allies may only 'create trouble'

By Doris C. Dumlao and Amy R. Remo

THE ENTRY OF SAN MIGUEL CORP. IN MANILA ELECTRIC CO. does not sit well with the Lopez family patriarch.

As far as Oscar Lopez is concerned, the 43-percent stake in Meralco controlled by San Miguel and its allies may only "create trouble" for the power distribution utility.

"The problem with San Miguel (is that) they're all over the place. They don't know what they want to focus their attention on, whether it's Meralco or Petron (Corp.)," Lopez said on the sidelines of the First Gen Corp. stockholders' meeting.

The Lopez clan's stake in Meralco has been diluted to 33.4 percent after it agreed to sell 20 percent of its holdings to the prized utility to businessman Manuel V. Pangilinan's group.

PLDT's Beneficial Trust Fund has also bought another 16.5 percent of Meralco from the open market, bringing the Pangilinan camp's interest to nearly a third of the utility.

Still, the Lopezes will retain management control of the country's biggest power retailer following an alliance with Singh

CONTINUED ON B2

BSP sees economy growing 4.1% this year

By Michelle V. Remo

THE BANGKO SENTRAL NG PILIPINAS said the economy has the potential to achieve the higher end of the official growth target of between 3.1 and 4.1 percent this year, citing foreign improvements in the financial markets offshore and steady global demand for Filipino labor.

BSP Governor Amando Tetangco Jr. said risk appetite among portfolio investors was gradually rising, a reason why the peso has appreciated in the past few days. As for money starts flowing to emerging markets like the Philippines, he said some corrections in the region have strengthened a bit.

The peso has reentered the 47-to-a-dollar territory this month after hovering in the 48 level in the previous weeks.

"Financial markets have started to re-

REPORT, B2

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Ayala Land readies 2nd 'Homestarter' bond issue

By Doris C. Dumlao

PROPERTY GIANT Ayala Land Inc. is planning the second of its series of pioneering retail "Homestarter" bond issues, which will be worth P50-M billion.

The "Homestarter" bond issue targets prospective home buyers who want to build up their funds for future acquisition of affordable and middle-income residential units.

The issuance has been approved by ALI's board, company chief finance officer Jaime Ysmael told the Philippine Stock Exchange yesterday. This series is nearly three times larger than the first issuance in 2006.

Of the amount, ALI will initially issue P25-billion worth of the retail bonds, with an option to increase the amount to P50-billion in case of oversubscription. This, however, is subject to the registration requirements of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

The schedule of the issuance of the bonds will be finalized later.

ALI first issued the "Homestarter" bonds in 2006 to show the company's confidence in the resilience of the affordable and middle-income housing segment amid a global economic slowdown.

The bonds will be priced at 200 percent of face value and will mature three years from issue date. At the end of the term, the customer can use the bonds to make a downpayment for the housing or condominium units built by ALI and its subsidiaries, Avida Land and Alveo Land.

The Ayala Land group usually requires a buyer to make a minimum cash equity equivalent to 20 percent of unit cost.

Like in the previous issuance, BDO Capital Corp. has been mandated to underwrite the bond issue. The bonds will be sold through a general public offering to retail investors.

In 2006, ALI sold P10-billion worth of "Homestarter" bonds. This investment tool included monthly investment of P1,000 to P25,000 over a three-year period with a 5-percent zero-compounded interest rate payable at the end of the term.

Petron earmarks $1B for upgrading

PETRON CORP. PLANS TO INVEST $1 BILLION in upgrading its Bataan refinery to sustain its growth momentum this year.

At the company's stockholders' meeting, Petron president Eric O. Recto said the upgrade would involve the acquisition of additional units of Petro-Fluidized Catalytic Cracker (PetroFCC 2), which would enable the company to fully convert residual fuel oil into higher value gasoline, liquefied petroleum gas, diesel and propylene.

At present, Petron's 180,000-barrel-per-day refinery produces a significant amount of low-value fuel oil for every barrel of crude processed.

"With our PetroFCC 1, Petron can only convert 75 percent of every barrel of crude to white products. PetroFCC 2 will give the company full conversion capability," he said.

According to Recto, the FCC 2 may take some five years to complete.

"It's not a refinery capacity issue that we are looking at. It is a refinery efficiency project that we have already embarked on, which is the first phase of the refinery upgrade. The first phase of the PetroFCC targets to increase the conversion efficiencies," Recto said.

Arup K. Basu

Sale of Red Vulcan stake seen this year

By Arup K. Basu

LOPEZ-LED FIRST GEN CORP. said it was hoping to clinch a deal with a prospective buyer of as much as 40 percent of Red Vulcan Holdings Corp. within the year.

First Gen owns 100 percent of Red Vulcan, which holds a 60-percent stake in PHOC Energy Development Corp., the geothermal energy arm of Philippine National Oil Co.

According to First Gen chief financial officer Thomas Glen Dean, the company's focus right now is to "normalize" its finances so it can be in a better position to negotiate the terms and pricing of the stake with prospective buyers. He, however, declined to name the prospective buyers of the Red Vulcan stake.

In 2007, Red Vulcan bought a 60-percent stake in PHOC-EDC for P10.1 billion.

At that time, First Gen had as its partner in Red Vulcan Indonesia firm Spektrum Holding BV. First Gen bought Spektrum's Red Vulcan stake in January, making the Lopez-owned firm the 100-percent owner of PHOC-EDC's energy projects.

First Gen has been planning to sell part of its stake in Red Vulcan since late-year and has tapped JP Morgan (SEA) Ltd. as financial adviser.

In that connection, First Gen president Federico R. Lopez said the company had already closed a five-year P200-million notes with the bond dealer at the onset of favorable rates.

The company, he said, had likewise finalized a $544-million refinancing of the San Rafay power plant and satellite P6.9-billion refinancing for San Lorenzo power plant.

"Today, we have reshaped parent company debt to $902.9 million from $961.4 million in December 2007 and paid the whole financing at Red Vulcan to P13.46 billion from P29.2 billion," Lopez said.

RLC finalizes plans for Magnolia property

THE GOKONGWEI-ROBINSONS Land Corp. plans to invest P30 billion to develop a five-hectare property that used to house the Magnolia Ice Cream Plant in New Manila, Quezon City, into a mixed-use complex to be called "The Magnolia Town Square."

It will be the first master-planned mixed-use complex in New Manila's upscale neighborhood targeting young couples and start-up families who chose to live in Quezon City, RLC assistant vice president Nina Clemente said.

The residential component will occupy 3.7 hectares, consisting of four towers.

The first tower will be launched this year and is expected to be completed in June 2014. It will consist of 424 units on 28 stories, with prices ranging from P2.8 million to P9.6 million.

Once completed, she said the Magnolia Town Square would not only enhance the market value of the property around it but also transform the New Manila landscape.

The project is strategically located and easily accessible to various transport services including the Light Railway Transit Line as well as numerous malls and hospitals, Clemente added.

The amenities for the residential towers include swimming pools for children and adults, fun gardens, jogging paths, game rooms, multipurpose rooms, children's indoor and outdoor playgrounds, a library and a fitness center.

Clemente said construction of the second residential tower would depend on the take-up of the first tower and the prevailing market conditions.

The remaining three hectares will be dedicated to a commercial shopping mall.

SMIC posts 13% Q1 profit growth

SM INVESTMENTS CORP. REPORTED A 13-percent increase in net income to the first three months of the year to P4.2 billion from P3.7 billion a year ago.

Consolidated revenue rose by 11 percent to P35.2 billion, buoyed by a 16.4-percent increase in retail sales to P23.7 billion, 22-percent rise in rental revenue to P3.5 billion and a 91-percent improvement in real estate sales to P1.6 billion.

Consolidated earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization in the first quarter stood at P8.4 billion for an industry margin of 24 percent.

SM president Henry T. Sy said, "SM is prepared to meet the challenge of a changing environment with rigor and a long-term view of the Philippine economy's resilience. This view motivates us in further expanding and improving our products and services not just to suit market needs, but more importantly, to give value for money to our customers."

SMI is now involved in five core businesses: retail and wholesale, mall development, banking and financial services, property development, and hotels and convention centers.

Disclosures

APC GROUP INC. (PSE: APC) will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on June 26 at 2 p.m. at the Highlands Prime Inc. Clubhouse, Tanay City. Stockholders of record as of May 27 will be entitled to notice of, and vote at, the meeting.

VISAYAN Cem. (formerly Philsteel Corp.) will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on June 26. Stockholders of record as of May 25 will be entitled to notice of, and vote at, the meeting.

SPC POWER Corp. is issued stockholders to submit by May 29 at 9:30 a.m., Manila Polo Club in Makati City. Stockholders of record as of May 11 will be entitled to notice of, and vote at, the meeting.

CHINABANK (Philippines) Commercial Bank Corp. announced that Rolando R. Avendaño, veteran treasurer and executive vice president/treasury group head effective June 8.

PETRON Corp. on May 12 elected the following as directors for 2009-2010: Ramon S. Ang, Eric O. Recto, Eduardo M. Cojuangco Jr., Estelito P. Mendoza, Bernardino R. Mon, Robert V. Coggin, Ron M. Haddock, Jaime Augusto Z. Bautista, Angelino T. Salud (independent director) and Ray-mundo B. David (independent director).

The board approved an increase in the company's authorized capital stock to P25 billion from P10 billion through the issuance of preferred shares.

Punongbayan & Araullo was appointed external auditor of the office for 2009.

PHOENIX Petroleum Philippines Inc. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on May 28 at 2 p.m. at the Manila Polo Club in Cheer City. Stockholders of record as of April 30 will be entitled to notice of, and vote at, the meeting.

PHILEX Mining Corp. on May 13 announced that the company's April production, based on provisional metal prices, amounted to P351 million—P47.5 million from gold, P288 million from copper and P5 million from silver.

PHILIPPINE Long Distance Telephone Co. has appointed **Syvia Gloria Nebres S. Co.** as the company's external auditor for 2009.

LIHAM Properties Corp. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on May 15 at 11:30 a.m. at the Heritage Hotel Manila in Pasay City. Stockholders of record as of April 30 will be entitled to notice of, and vote at, the meeting.

CITOM Properties Philippines Inc. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on May 28 at 9 a.m. at the Manila Golf and Country Club in Makati City. Stockholders of record as of April 28 will be entitled to notice of, and vote at, the meeting.

DIGITEL Telecommunications Philippines Inc. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on May 28 at 9:30 a.m. at the Crowne Plaza Galleria Manila in Quezon City. Stockholders of record as of March 31 will be entitled to notice of, and vote at, the meeting.

Compiled by Alice Victorio and Lourrence de Guzman, Inquirer Research

Philippine Stock Exchange

As of May 13, 2009

Currencies

May 13, 2009 Country	Unit	Peso Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	47.5000	1.0000	47.5000
Japan	100 Yen	49.0100	1.0321	49.0100
United Kingdom	Pound	71.0000	1.4947	71.0000
Hong Kong	Dollar	6.1300	0.1291	6.1300
Taiwan	Dollar	1.4500	0.0305	1.4500
Canada	Dollar	43.5000	0.9158	43.5000
Singapore	Dollar	33.1500	0.6979	33.1500
Australia	Dollar	33.8000	0.7116	33.8000
Bahrain	Dinar	126.0000	2.6526	126.0000
South Korea	Won	0.0377	0.0008	0.0377
Kuwait	Dinar	170.0000	3.5789	170.0000
Malaysia	Ringgit	13.2000	0.2779	13.2000
Thailand	Baht	1.3900	0.0293	1.3900
UAE	Dirham	12.9300	0.2721	12.9300
EU	Euro	67.0000	1.4105	67.0000
China	Yuan	6.9600	0.1465	6.9600
Macau	Pataca	5.9400	0.1250	5.9400
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.0046	0.0001	0.0046
India	Rupee	0.9700	0.0204	0.9700
Saudi Arabia	Riyal	12.6600	0.2665	12.6600
New Zealand	Dollar	25.7000	0.5411	25.7000
Sweden	Krona	5.9200	0.1246	5.9200
Norway	Krone	7.4800	0.1574	7.4800

Source: Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (May 13, 2009)

BIR admits it missed April collection target

By Ronnel W. Domingo

THE BUREAU OF INTERNAL REVENUE (BIR) admitted that it missed its P100.0-billion collection target for April—a time when yield is seasonally high since the deadline for tax payments falls in that month.

BIR Commissioner Jose S. Empleo Jr. IV could not yet give figures, but said the economic downturn was to blame.

However, Empleo was quick to add that collection of value added tax was holding up due to stricter enforcement.

"We lashed so collection trends in a [recently held] workshop and estimates show that only VAT collections are growing relative to the previous year," he said.

The BIR chief said other collections, like income tax and excise tax, were contracting.

"The regional directors agree that unprojected VAT collection, despite the downturn, can be attributed to our enforcement activities like Oplan Katok[ada]," Empleo said.

"This means our campaign is taking effect," he said. "People are being forced to pay the correct [taxes]."

During the first quarter, the BIR collected P154.0 billion—P16.5 billion short of its target and 11.8 billion less than year-ago collections.

Also yesterday, the BIR signed a memorandum of agreement with the Integrated Bar of the Philippines, Philippine Institute of Certified Public Accountants, and Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry to implement Hamong Magbigkis[ad].

The project is meant to institutionalize the establishment nationwide of one-stop shop Taxpayer Service Counters in all BIR offices, rendering frontline services to taxpayers.

SMC eyes $700M from sale of int'l unit

By Doris C. Dumlao

FOOD AND BEVERAGE CONGLOMERATE San Miguel Corp. expects to raise up to $800 million from the sale of its international beer operations and the initial public offering of its packaging business.

"I think we can do this within the year," San Miguel president Ramon Ang said.

Proceeds shall be used to help fund San Miguel's acquisitions, pare down debt and cover organic expansion.

Ang said that the conglomerate could generate up to $700 million from the sale of its overseas beer business to subsidiary San Miguel Brewery Inc.

Asked how SMB will fund the acquisition, Ang said the beer brewery had room to increase its borrowings if needed.

"SMB has a very strong cash flow," Ang yesterday told reporters. "It can handle more bank loans."

SMB earlier acquired from its parent company its domestic beer brands and other related assets using proceeds from a P38.6-billion local bond offering.

San Miguel still owns 51 percent of SMB while Japanese beer-maker Kirin has a 49-percent stake.

On the planned IPO of San Miguel packaging, Ang said the conglomerate had pledged to its Japanese partners the Singaporean group, to list this subsidiary but Miguel Brewery Inc.

arm in the Philippine Stock Exchange this year.

According to Ang, San Miguel may raise about $300 million from the sale of 18-19 percent of the packaging unit to the public.

He said Singapura, which has a 35-percent stake in the packaging business, would keep its stake in the packaging business.

Similar to the way SMB was spun off and separately listed on the local bourse last year, San Miguel believes that a stand-alone packaging operations will enhance this division's ability to compete more effectively and raise the fresh equity needed for it to grow faster to this era of globalization.

SMC's packaging unit posted P19.66 billion in net sales last year, up by 6 percent the previous year. This accounted for nearly 12 percent of the conglomerate's consolidated net sales of P1.68 billion.

This group posted a net income of P1.37 billion from operations in 2008, over three times higher than the P423 million operating earnings the previous year.

The packaging group services many of the region's leading food, pharmaceutical, chemical, beverages and personal care manufacturers. It serves not only the domestic market but has also made inroads in other markets in the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, Africa and the United States.

Catanduanes gets a break from wind

By Amy R. Remo

THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT of Catanduanes plans to harness "nasty winds" for power generation, according to a report.

In a bid to develop alternative energy sources, the province plans to put up and develop a wind farm in the coastal municipality of San Andres, with the help of the Spanish government, Catanduanes Rep. Joseph A. Santiago said.

Facing the Pacific Ocean, Catanduanes has been dubbed the "Land of the Howling Wind."

Already, Santiago said Spain's Fondo de Ayuda al Desarrollo had conducted around 19.5 million (148,910 euros) to fund a feasibility study for the wind farm project.

"The Spanish aid agency has committed to realize the wind farm system, with the municipal government coordinating the site and providing electricity to the windfarm," Santiago said.

The proposed wind farm would consist of a group of wind turbines that will be used to produce electricity. A wind farm covering a large area may have a few dozen turbines, but the land in between the turbines may still be used for farming or other productive purposes, he explained.

"Actually, being an archipelago with an extensive coastline, the Philippines is highly conducive to wind farms," Santiago said.

He pointed out that a wind farm could also be located off shore to take advantage of strong winds blowing in from the ocean.

Based on the studies conducted by the US National Renewable Energy Laboratory and the Department of Energy, the country has vast renewable energy potential, including 76,000 MW of wind capacity.

Santiago also stressed the need for the government and private sector to develop other renewable energy sources to avert the risks that come with oil crisis.

'08 software piracy losses ballooned to $202M

By Daniel L. Lucas

ESTIMATED LOSSES DUE TO rampant software piracy in the Philippines rose sharply last year, due to the higher value of the illegally used products.

According to the latest BSA-IDC Global Software Piracy Study, the personal computer software piracy level in the Philippines stood at 69 percent in 2008, similar to the rate registered in 2007.

Dollar losses caused by software piracy continued to increase, however, rising to $202 million in 2008 compared to losses of $147 million in 2007.

The latest edition of the study, now on its sixth year, was released yesterday by the Business Software Alliance (BSA). It was conducted by IDC, an information technology-oriented international market research and forecasting firm.

The fact that the rate of software piracy in the Philippines has not gone down last year and losses in the industry continued to mount, makes the current administration's anti-piracy efforts by the government and private sector even more crucial, according to BSA's Philippine consultant Brownbill-A. Marquez III.

"Losses in the software industry due to piracy further hinder our economic recovery," he said. "Filipinos should realize that whenever they buy a pirated copy of a software program, or when a business decides to use more copies of a software than they had bought licenses for, they are not only stealing the intellectual property of the software developers . . . they are also creating many of our countrymen as lose job opportunities as a result of lost revenues."

Sagging banana industry

Conrado R. Bawad III

THIS ONE WILL GET OUR award for the most outdated (ugly) stupid study of the year.

And to think, the study was commissioned by the Department of Health! Heaven help us!

Okay, in background, something savage stopped up and down the national banana plantations in the Mindanao.

It had nothing to do with Manny Pacquiao's newfound fixation with politics, because it involves aerial spraying of fungicides, which is the process by which banana plantations to the world.

Some groups (i.e., non-government organizations) have raised the alarm against aerial spraying, calling it a health hazard. The DOH, much much later, of course, conducted a study.

Anyway, the study involved an enormous group of 38 residents (16 adults and 22 children) from Sitio Canocan, Hagonoy town in Davao del Sur.

The area is next to the plantations of the Guthrie Agricultural and Development Corp., or Gadeco.

Hired by the DOH for the study were the Philippine Society of Clinical and Occupational Toxicology, and the National Poison Management and Control Center of the University of the Philippines.

The group presented their findings to the public only last Tuesday in Davao City, in a forum of scientists, banana industry members, and NGOs.

The study noted "statistically negligible" levels of fungicide in the air, soil and water in Sitio Canocan.

Translation: There's hardly any residue in the area from the aerial spraying.

Since that is the case, just because of the alarming fact that the study groups could hardly detect ...even with the use of scientific instruments ... any fungicide residue anywhere in the area, the most logical conclusion is clear:

And that is, according to the study, the government should ban aerial spraying. Really?

My only comment is, well, what has that got to do with the price of eggs in China?

* * *

SATURDAY, the Filipino Banana Growers and Exporters Association (PBGEA) coincidentally sent out press statements to correct what it called—in so many words—a stupid conclusion.

To start with, the study covered only 38 residents, and this number is really just a small sampling.

Thousands upon thousands work in those huge banana plantations in Mindanao.

Okay, so the study looked (i.e. when it called "health concerns" of the 38 residents of the small barangay.

Because of their "health concerns," all those plantations should just close down, is that it?

Banning aerial spraying will surely lead to the destruction of one of the major dollar earners of this country.

Look, the Philippines is the biggest exporter of bananas to Japan, exporting more than 95 percent of the market in that country.

Of course, if the Philippine banana industry collapses, the banana industries in Latin America will jump for joy.

* * *

THUS, the legion of scientists and technical people working for the multibillion-peso banana industry is ignoring the logic of the "ban" conclusion.

They say aerial spraying has the approval of the Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority, or FPA.

Besides, regarding the "health concerns" of the 38 people in the study, everybody is able to read the report. Even we all have "health concerns," do we not? Time is falling bad.

Anyway, even the guys down here in my barangay know that "health concerns" have a thousand and one causes, such as poverty, malnutrition and medication in the past.

Okay, so let us ban aerial spraying, thereby killing the local banana industry, thus propping up instead the banana industries of other countries. What will happen?

Thousands of people in those banana plantations will get sick and perhaps even die. Believe me, they will have nothing to eat.

* * *

BASED on its disclosure at the stock exchange, Security Bank posted a 22-percent ROE (return on equity) in the past quarter.

That is already better than the bank's 19-percent ROE in 2008. Thus the bank continues to rank one of the best ROE records in the domestic banking system.

To think, such a figure was never reported in media, which of course focused on the 19-percent drop in the bank's net income, or around P750 million, during the period.

I can understand why. Well, the drop in income threw the effort of the worldwide financial meltdown even on local banks, such as the highly profitable Security Bank. In other words, the leading system here is feeling the effects of the US meltdown.

But the fact remains that, in the first quarter last year, the bank recorded extraordinary earnings in its securities and foreign exchange trading. Moreover, it posted a one-time profit from the sale of some assets in that period.

And so, if you look closer, the bank actually posted a 24-percent increase in net income in terms (P1.4 billion versus P1.1 billion).

And the first quarter results showed that the bank is on track in its performance targets for 2009.

How was that achieved? Well, the bank is trying to shift to lending (retail lessons up-front) on its profit center is fees, it reported a 36-percent growth of its loan portfolio (now at P67 billion).

Here's the clincher: Despite its giving out more loans, the bank's non-performing loans ratio is an enviable 1.4 percent.

That, the last time I checked, is among the best in the local banking industry.

Cement firms seek DTI action against importer

LOCAL CEMENT MANUFACturers are asking the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to take legal action against a cement importer who allegedly violated a conditional release order covering imported cement from China.

Through its lawyers, the Cemex Manufacturing Corporation of the Philippines (CEMEX), told the DTI's Bureau of Product Standards (DTI-BPS) that the industry lobby group has evidence of the violations committed by cement importer Topway Building Inc.

The group has urged BPS director Jesus L. Montemayor to withhold the import commodity clearances and revoke the "conditional release" order for Topway's imported cement for violating the Consumer Act of the Philippines, among others.

CEMEX is represented by the Villamin, Cruz, Rimorin and Aranguez law firm.

According to the group, a conditional release for 10,000 bags of cement packaged in 50-kilo grass bags was issued by the BPS last April 14.

According to the law firm's letter to the DTI-BPS, dated April 22, however, was an alleged violation of the cement conditional release, which mandated that the products be temporarily stored at a designated site in Bataj City. CeMAP lawyers said the cement was brought to another location.

The lawyers also claimed that the BPS allowed Topway to import cement in 50-kilogram bags, instead of the mandated 40-kilogram bags without the required markings, in violation of the Consumer Act. The law is meant to ensure compliance with product standards. Dandy L. Lucas

San Miguel unit, GSIS forge P3-B property deal

Joint venture to put up serviced apartment near Greenbelt 1

By Doris C. Dionisio

SAN MIGUEL PROPERTIES INC. has entered into a P3-billion joint venture deal with the Government Service Insurance System to develop the premier fund's 2,833-square-meter prime property near Greenbelt 1 into an upscale serviced apartment.

San Miguel Corp.'s property development arm also plans to develop a 27-hectare property in Bacolor, Pampanga, adjacent to Shangri-La hotel, into a residential condominium complex, SMPI head of real estate development Alan Cosa said in a briefing after the company's stockholders' meeting yesterday.

SMPI formed a 50:50-percent joint venture company with the GSIS to develop the property and raise its own funding for the project.

The GSIS land is valued at P300 million, which will be treated as part of the equity into the joint venture.

The rest of the P3-billion construction cost will be sourced externally, according to SMPI head of finance and administration Gil Bondoc, Jr.

The serviced apartment building will have 424 units that will be leased out under six-month and one-year contracts. It will have 228 units overlooking a three-floor podium. This is SMPI's first foray into the serviced apartment business.

"Most of the rupee would rather go to serviced apartments than to a single detached house in Alabang or even in Diamond Hill (Makati). One, it's secure and two, it's a owner's driven away from their office," Cosa said.

SMPI also announced plans to jumpstart the development of its Boracay property, which was acquired less than a year ago.

"It's basically on the planning stage," Cosa said. "We're closely observing the operations of Shangri-La, which sells rooms for anywhere between $600 and $1,000 a night. So you can imagine already where we'll fit in."

"Because of the high rate [charged by Shangri-La], there is a big window for a developer like San Miguel Properties to go there and get a piece of the action," Cosa said.

European firm sets up Asian hub in Iloilo

By Hector P. Bürgos Jr.
Inquirer Visayas

ILOILO CITY—A EUROPEAN software development company has set up a subsidiary in Tigbauan town in Iloilo, providing a big boost to the province's efforts to establish the information and communication technology (ICT) map.

The Iloilo-based ISI2 Software opened its two-story office last April 28 in a ceremony attended by the company executives and Iloilo officials led by Gov. Niel Tupas Jr. and Iloilo Rep. Augusto Syjuco.

The office would serve as the company's base in Asia, according to statement posted on the ISI2 website.

According to the company, ISI2 Software would initially employ around 20 workers, but would hire more when it expands its operations here.

"ISI2 has been seeking opportunities to set up an office in Asia. As a global company, Asia is a key region for our business, which offers numerous business opportunities. Furthermore, from here, we will be providing software development and support services to our clients worldwide," ISI2 Software chief executive officer Mirko Schnitzler said in the statement.

The company is a global provider of card payment solutions, IT consultancy and related services to international and domestic banks, service providers, retailers and other financial organizations.

It has formed its operations for the past two decades on the development and implementation of card payment solutions.

ISI2 Software chair Reinhold Schäffler, incidentally, is married to a resident of the town.

Dominic Abad, Western Visayas director of the Department of Trade and Industry, said the opening of the office in Iloilo had also firmed up the province's position on the ICT map.

"It shows confidence in the skills of our workforce specifically on software development," Abad told the Inquirer in a telephone interview.

HSBC employees get more than they give

By Doris C. Dionisio

CORPORATE SOCIO-CIVIC ACTIVITIES, especially those that promote active staff participation, can be more than a mere public relations tool.

Based on the experience of British banking giant HSBC, which has focused on the civic tasks of helping protect the environment and educating kids in the Philippines, investments in corporate social responsibility (CSR) come back.

"I won't put it on any corporate coupon whether project seizes I can get my staff involved. To be honest, it's good for business," says Mark Watkinson, HSBC country chief executive officer.

HSBC has over 2,000 people from the best universities in the Philippines.

"They are smart and they are great ambassadors for the bank. So if I can get these guys out in the community it's good for them and the bank," Watkinson says.

HSBC estimates that close to three of five of employees are in their 20s.

"That's over a thousand young people who come to me and say, 'I want to change the world, how are you going to help me? If you can't help me, I'm leaving. Basically, if I want to keep my best staff I can't survive unless I'm actually helping them (rather than spend less than five years in a company), I have to find opportunities for them to change the world or, at least, help them make an impact," Watkinson says.

In the Philippines, HSBC has decided to focus on educational programs for public elementary school students and career children in order to complement programs that tackle climate change.

In addition to the usual financial support, the bank aims to include considerable opportunities for employee engagements and volunteerism.

The results speak for themselves.

From only 600 volunteers in 2007, 2,000 of HSBC's 2,300 employees have participated in an outreach project as of last year.

"If the staff is highly engaged, you will work together as a business and the organization is very good for us," he says.

HSBC does not demand a lot from its employees, recognizing they have other things to do in their lives. The benchmark is to volunteer an hour of service per person in a quarter, or about four hours a year.

People are, of course, exceeding the minimum requirement.

Watkinson is particularly proud of HSBC's "Eco-Ride" project, a one-month, four-member program through which HSBC volunteers enhance their garden in public schools and engage the support of climate change and how to incorporate realistic solutions into their daily lives.

For an hour each week in a month, HSBC volunteers go to public schools to talk about climate change and its impact, energy efficiency and recycling.

"Watkinson is keen on measuring the impact of its activities, so in turn into the kids at the beginning and the end of the program.

"On average, in over 20 public schools that we did that, the increase in knowledge is about 132 percent, so it's significant," Watkinson says.

"It's a great experience for a young person, to be a great role model, to be in front of the class. What really makes it worthwhile is the teachers say the kids bring them almost changing light with environmentally efficient bulbs so there are a couple of classrooms that had their lights replaced. The kids won't leave them alone. It's super cool," he says.

Among the schools that had taken part in the program are Pembo Elementary School in Makati and Taguig Elementary School and G-20 Corps in Taguig.

HSBC works with NWF Watch Wise Fund for Nature to choose a new school each month for this program. About 25,000-30,000 children have undergone this eco-site tour.

Watkinson is also proud of "HSBC Read with Me" program, which the bank developed last year at Pembo Elementary School.

This is an innovative weekly reading program with its own independent diagnostic test used as a metric. The program is also implemented by HSBC staff volunteers and in its first year, managed to lift the reading and comprehension scores of 1,000 public school First-graders by about 15 percent.

This year, "Read with Me One on One" was developed by the bank's marketing head Clara Buenke to reach out to the last 10 percent of the children in the program.

"With this reading program, we're trying to improve the standards of spoken English. We interact once a week, so that's one thousand children a week," Watkinson says.

In this new program, the poorest readers are brought to the bank for a one-on-one reading session on a Thursday or a day before the regular reading program.

Another program that brings institutional pride to HSBC is "Pera sa Piso." It awarded three nongovernment organizations—SOS Children's Village, Childhope Asia and Philippine Christian Foundation—$75,000 each for three years to improve the lives of Filipino street children.

Apart from giving money to these NGOs, the bank finds ways to interact with the beneficiaries.

In the case of Philippine Christian Foundation, which runs a livelihood program for kids in Tondo, HSBC has developed a complementary volunteer program.

"What happens is that these kids look after the younger kids. But to free the older kids can turn out at the livelihood program, we build a classroom for younger kids," Watkinson says.

In general, HSBC's support involves around a fun activity like kite-making, cupcake decorating, movie day, cleaning or basketball.

The programs were conceptualized to deal what the NGOs felt were the children's exact priorities. Watkinson says the projects and interaction with people they could consider as role models.

The programs implemented have considerably improved HSBC's employee morale and engagement scores as reflected in the bank's yearly survey of employees.

With employees' heightened interest in volunteerism, the foreign bank's new challenge is to develop enough volunteer programs to address the yearning to make a difference in the lives of others.

THROUGH HSBC's education programs, public school children's knowledge of the environment and climate change has increased by 132 percent.

BSP sees economy ... From page B1

prove—an indication that they are seeing something positive as far as recovery of the global economy is concerned," Tetangco told reporters at the sidelines of the launching of the Citi Microentrepreneur Award of the Year yesterday in Manila.

Tetangco said industrialized nations like the United States are expected to recover from the recession either in the latter part of the year or early 2010.

Improved liquidity through portfolio investments helps boost direct investments which, in turn, are needed to create jobs and fuel up the economy.

Tetangco said improving confidence in the financial market indicated that the real sector could soon follow. He said there were a few months' lag between gains in the financial markets and the real sector.

The BSP official said another reason for optimism was the opening of alternative labor markets for Filipino workers. Although some overseas Filipino workers were affected by layoffs in advanced economies, other countries have announced huge demand for expatriate labor.

Tetangco cited Canada, Qatar and New Zealand as having opened up labor opportunities for Filipinos. He added that Saudi Arabia, which is set to build six mega cities, has announced demand for thousands of workers for the construction sector.

Stocks up on good ... From page B1

The composite index rose 20.49 points to 2,050.60, while the all-shares broader index up to 0.73 percent to 1,450.22.

There were 74 gainers, 36 losers and 41 that were unchanged.

Volume totaled 2.01 billion shares worth P1.56 billion.

"Time Union is the interconnector by key local companies of the 'Manila group'" to the first quarter, said Ang Cabos of A and A Securities Inc.

"It came out simultaneously with the rise of the US market," which further boosted the local market, she added. AFP

SMC in Meralco ... From page B1

tion—and San Miguel's decision not to seek control of Meralco.

San Miguel president Ramon Ang reiterated this yesterday during the Lopez family's annual management contest of Meralco "for a long, long time." Meralco stockholders are holding their annual meeting on May 26.

Ang said Meralco chair Manolo Lopez was a "very nice guy" and that San Miguel would strive to keep him at the helm of the utility. "He will take care of the management," he said.

Ang added that Meralco president Jose de Jesus would also retain his current post.

Investor sources said Manolo was the one who invited Jun Ang to join the Meralco board, a deal he was in good terms with Ang, as opposed to a takeover overtures from Dizon.

But Oscar Lopez said he both or Manolo would "continue maybe for a year or two" as titles, also their although he is expected to resign from as chief executive officer for the directors during the company's stockholders' meeting.

Asked about the First Pacific group's interest in acquire a majority stake in Meralco, Ang reiterated since last May 27, 27 percent stake was not for sale.

"The investment of Jun Miguel in Meralco is a good investment. What we bought that, there was no PHR yet," he said.

Ang was referring to the approval by the Energy Regulatory Commission of a performance-based rate (PBR) last month that allowed Meralco to increase its distribution rate in an average P1.227 a kilowatt hour. As it is incentive-based, the PBR methodology is expected to result in lower electricity rates, more efficient delivery of power and improved quality and value of a firm's assets.

Under the PBR scheme, Meralco was mandated to complete its proposed capital expenditure projects amounting to P28.68 billion from 2007 to 2011. This scheme would have supposedly also resulted in rates increasing new PBR-based tariffs beginning July 2007.

Republic of the Philippines
Province of La Union
Municipality of Santo Tomas
OFFICE OF THE BIDS AND AWARDS COMMITTEE

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The Municipality of Santo Tomas, La Union, through its Bids and Awards Committee (BAC), invites engineers to apply for eligibility and to bid for the following project:

Name of Project: Dredging of Poleo River
Location of Project: Poblacion, Santo Tomas, La Union

Item No.	Items/Description	Qty.	Unit	Approved Budget for the Contract
1	Excavation	7,500	Cum	Php 2,000,000.00
2	Riprap/Gabion Facing	800	Cum	Php 2,000,000.00

Contract Duration: 180 Calendar Days

Prospective bidders should have experience in constructing a similar project within the last 5 years with an amount of at least 50% of the project's cost for bidding. The Municipality of Santo Tomas, La Union, reserves the right to reject any or all bids. Bidders should comply with the Philippine Contractors Accreditation Board (PCAB) and be accredited.

All particulars relative to Eligibility Assistance and Screening, Bid Security, Performance Security, Evaluation of Bids, Reconsideration and Award of Contract shall be governed by the pertinent provisions of R.A. 9184 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).

The complete schedule of activities is listed, as follows:

	Activities	Schedule
1.	Advertisement of Invitation	May 15 - June 15, 2009
2.	Issuance of Bidding Documents	May 15 - June 15, 09 AM
3.	Opening of Bids	June 15, 2009 - 10:00 AM
4.	Bid Evaluation	June 15, 2009
5.	Post-qualification	June 15, 2009
6.	Notice of Award	June 15, 2009
7.	Notice to Proceed	June 15, 2009

The Municipality will not accept unsolicited calls or proponents before, during or after the bidding. For further information, please refer to the Municipality of Santo Tomas, La Union.

The Municipality of Santo Tomas, La Union reserves its responsibility whatsoever for the cancellation of a bid/s held in the separation of any or all bids.

CONTACT PERSON:
[illegible]
BAC Chairman

Approved:
[illegible]
BAC Chairman

CAMARINES SUR I ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.
(CASURECO I)
Pues Patria, Ubanidad, Camarines Sur

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The Camarines Sur Electric Cooperative, Inc. (CASURECO I), invites prospective bidders to apply for eligibility and to bid for the following projects:

1. Energization of 10 Sitios – Awards of Contract are subject to the Construction of Distribution Facilities and Equipment Budget for the Contract in the Amount of P1,000,000.00

Last Day for Submission of Eligibility Documents	May 22, 2009
Opening of Applications for Eligibility	May 22, 2009

2. CASURECO I Substation Projects – For bidding for the Supply, Delivery, Construction, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of One (1) 10MVA Substation at Buhi Lagonoy, Ragay, Caramoan Substation with an Approved Budgetary for the Contract in the Amount of P10,000,000.00

Last Day for Submission of Eligibility Documents	May 22, 2009
Opening of Applications for Eligibility	May 22, 2009

Applications for eligibility will be assessed and recommended approval by the Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) of CASURECO I. Only those prospective bidders found eligible by the BAC shall be allowed to bid. Bidding Documents upon the Payment of Non-Refundable Fee of P5,000.00 for Each Project. Bidding Documents upon payment of Non-Refundable Fee of P5,000.00 for Each Project. Bidding Documents upon payment of Non-Refundable Fee of P5,000.00 for Each Project.

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1. Energization of 10 Sitios

Last Day for Submission of Eligibility Documents	May 22, 2009
Opening of Applications for Eligibility	May 22, 2009

2. CASURECO I Substation Projects

Last Day for Submission of Eligibility Documents	May 22, 2009
Opening of Applications for Eligibility	May 22, 2009

Bidding will be conducted through open competitive bidding procedures as specified in Republic Act 9184, otherwise known as the "Government Procurement Reform Act". Bidding is open to all qualified bidders with long experience in the field, unless otherwise provided for in the Bidding Documents.

All Bids must be accompanied by a Bid Security as specified in the Bidding Documents. Late bids will not be accepted. Bids will be opened in the presence of bidders or their authorized representatives who choose to attend at the address mentioned in the Bidding Documents. For further information, please refer to the Bids and Awards Committee Secretariat at the CASURECO I Office, Pues Patria, Ubanidad, Camarines Sur, Tel. No. [illegible].

CASURECO I reserves the right to accept or reject any Bid, to annul the Bidding process, and to reject all Bids at any time prior to contract award, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected bidder or bidders.

Engr. [illegible]
BAC Chairman

NOTED:

[illegible]
Manager

[illegible]

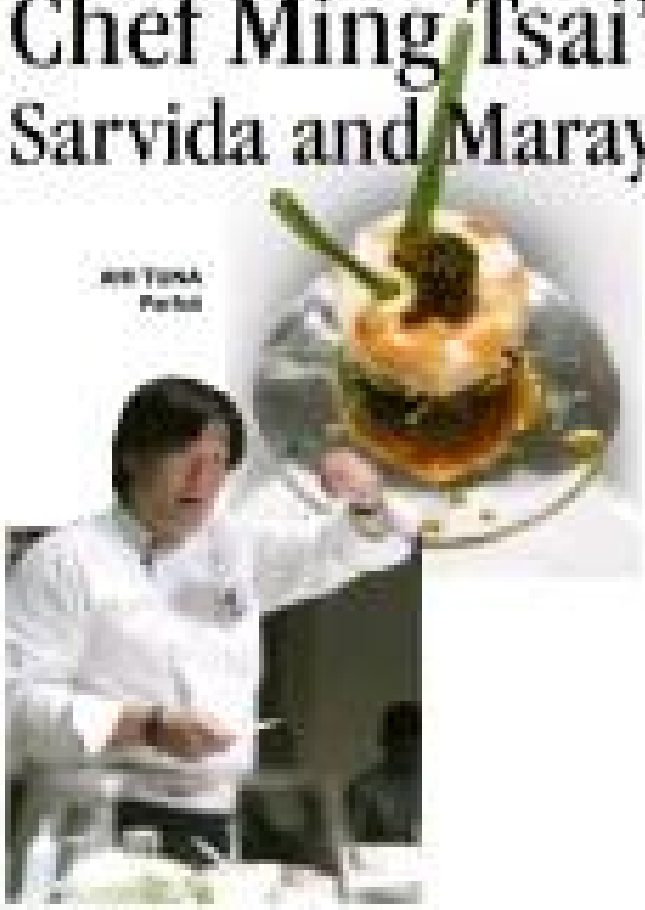
IN THIS ISSUE

■ **Manny Pacquiao's** fave dishes and tony LA home /C2

Editor Thelma Sioson San Juan

LIFESTYLE *Food*

Chef Ming Tsai's tuna parfait, Sarvida and Marayama's 35-in pizza



AHI TUNA Parfait

CHEF Ming and his Kyocera knife

KITCHEN RESCUE

Peggy Agbayani

CHEF MING TSAI WAS IN Manila two weeks ago. The culprit in his cooking demonstrations was much coveted, comparable only to an Araneta Coliseum championship game.

There are two striking things about chef Ming—his ability to go on and on, telling tales of his experiences and cuisine and his favorite ceramic chef's knife, which he says is an extension of his arm.

Curious, I raised my hand as a

(WEB EX)

MANNY Pacquiao's Los Angeles house is located near the vicinity of Hancock Park...a posh, quiet neighborhood where the "old rich" live. It has four bedrooms including a guest room. At their backyard garden is a rectangular inlet pool with waterfalls surrounded by Japanese bamboo grasses and a wooden shed we saw sale for outdoor barbecues.

THE BOYS' bedroom for Jimuel and Michael showcases blue colour tools with playful printed beddings...green lamp on center night table and hanging multicolored "planety" on closet

The global champ's favorite dishes are diet-friendly: 'tinola' and 'tocsilog,' the ingredients coming from the bounty of Sarangani, henceforth to be known as Pacquiao Land

KINGDOM for Manny and Jinkee's two darling daughters, Princess and Queenie, in soft rose beige with naturally warm and touches of pink shades—eclectic corner table lamp, butterfly painting in pastels and pink cotton candy-net canopy

Manny Pacquiao's fave dishes and tony LA home

IT'S NO WONDER MANNY Pacquiao is the world's best pound-for-pound fighter, as illustrated by his quick demolition of Ricky Hatton, the 6th legend who nanay had thought would not only go the distance against the Filipino slugger, but would also deal him his Waterloo.

Alas, Hatton didn't know what he was getting into, checking the smoke herald by going down into the canvas in the second round, inducing Manny who had dealt him the smashing left, his chief arsenal. Even Manny confessed he had thought it would be an uphill climb.

But Manny had come to the fight prepared. And he had come to it with his favorite diet of Filipino food, luring him to finish the fight early so he could finally pigout, fueled by Cebu on the eve of the fight when he found cellcall about training for the Hatton bout in the US, he said he missed Filipino food. "I love Filipino food," he added.

But Manny does not really have to obtain from his favorite dishes because they are as familiar as they come: tinola, the Filipino chicken/tomb/char cooked with fresh veggies; and tocsilog, the fried sweet and sour fish dish garnished with delicious vegetables. The ingredients predictably come from the luscious flora and marine bounty of Sarangani, now called Pacquiao Land down Mindanao.

Tinola is one of the simplest Pinoy dishes to prepare. The only variation, it seems, is the chicken stock. There are stocks that look unequivocal, like those that look petroleum or "maganda." There are those with "chaos" stocks. But the best stocks still, as far as Filipino taste is concerned, are native chicken.

Here are some takes on Manny Pacquiao's favorite chicken and fish dishes:

THE MASTER'S bedroom is accented by a splash of colorful artwork above the headboard and a white, longback single lounge chair with matching ruby throw pillows.

(CLOCKWISE from top) Jinkee Pacquiao, Jimi James Quiboloy's twin sister), Undersecretary for National Security and ret. Gen. Cesar Singian and Visita Nervosa

Tinola

Heat 3 tbsp vegetable oil.

When oil is hot, add 1 whole chicken (cut up) and cook until slightly brown for about 15 minutes. This gives the tinola more depth.

Remove chicken.

Saute ½ diced garlic, smashed; 4 ginger slices, julienne; 1 onion, thinly sliced, and 3 tomatoes.

Season chicken pieces.

Add 1 tsp whole peppercorns.

Put enough water to cover chicken, just enough to submerge, not drown, them. The water line should be where the chicken pieces are. You have not on the flavor if it gets watered down.

Bring to a boil and lower heat to simmer.

Cook over very low heat for 20 minutes.

Add green papaya or sayote and cook until tender.

Season to taste with patis.

Add green malunggay or dahon ng sili. Chili leaves have flavor to tinola. For as much of it as you want.

Remove to taste with fish sauce.

Your tinola will have a nice deep, rich color. The flavor comes, with a taste full-bodied broth.

Lapu-lapu Escabeche

1 ½ to 2 kilos lapu-lapu or any fish, cut into 3-inch pieces

2 tbsp cornstarch

2 tbsp rice vinegar

2 tsp light soy sauce

3-4 tbsp tomato sauce or 3-5 tsp tomato paste...adjust depending on desired color of escabeche sauce

2/3 c stock...fish or chicken stock will do

2 tsp Tabasco sauce...adjust to taste

1 tsp minced fresh ginger

Juice of 1 large lime

Combine all ingredients, except lime juice, in a saucepan.

Mix well and bring to a boil.

Simmer 15 minutes or until sauce is slightly thickened.

Remove from heat, add in lime juice.

Adjust ingredients, amounts and spice according to your preferences.

Mix in sauteed vegetables.

Pour over fried lapu-lapu.

Garnish with coriander sprigs if desired.

Note: You can opt to add 1/3 c of drained pineapple chunks to the other cooking for that tropical taste.

Vegetables:

1 green bell pepper, sliced

1 red bell pepper, sliced

2 red onions, sliced

1 tbsp oil

Heat skillet.

Add oil.

Quickly saute vegetables, being careful not to overcook or soft them.

Mix with sauce.

1 lapu-lapu, cleaned, scaled and sauced

Season with salt and pepper.

Heat oil; make sure you have enough to submerge lapu-lapu.

Score.

Deep fry fish. For sessions per side, until golden brown and crunchy.

Drain fish on paper towels to remove excess oil.

Put fish on serving dish.

Pour sauce over.

Garnish with coriander sprigs (wansoy).

THE LIVING room with genuine white sofa set by the fireplace

A TOP shot along the stairway of the living room's chapel ceiling overlooking the dining area with a rectangular Hoosier glaming table

Chef Ming Tsai's tuna parfait, Sarvida and Marayama's 35-in pizza

From page 61

The Ryusica experience is like no other. It is like having a highly exclusive top...no lights and cats in puncho that it takes away the cumbersome process that usually comes with food preparation.

In fact, my madness never pig-ging when I described it as my new top—"Amom pong kabayanhon."

The mandolin is another beautiful story light and easy perfectly clean. So memorable at P1,570, considering how much conventional mandolins cost (Ryusica, 0917-5355604).

But those looking for a good knife, there are other reasons why you might want to consider purchasing Ryusica.

• Ceramics are formed in nature through thousands of years of crystallization, extreme temperature and literally tons of pressure, then 90 percent hardness than steel and second only to diamond in hardness, holding their edge at least 10 times longer than traditional knives.

• Ceramic knives won't loosen food nor transfer that "metallic taste." Strong impressions on acids, oils and salts, they never rust.

• Plus, sharpening is free.

Now on to recipe requests from those who were unable to attend Manila Street Ming.

Here is the first of two recipes demonstrated by chef Ming. The other one will be published next week, since Lulu asked for a smoothie idea for entertaining. Her son turns seven on May 18.

Ahi Tuna Parfait

Vinaigrette

½ tbsp each Dijon mustard and naturally brewed rice wine vinegar

¼c canola oil

1 tbsp splash of tabasco

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Combine the mustard, vinegar, oil and tabasco in a small bowl. Season with salt and pepper and whisk lightly.

Tuna

½ lb no. 1 grade ahi tuna, sushi-cut, as red and fresh as possible, pristine cut, cut into very small cubes

3 dashes Tabasco sauce

1 tbsp finely chopped chives, plus 8 whole chives

1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Fill a large bowl with ice. Place a smaller bowl on the ice and mix all ingredients. Season with salt and pepper.

To assemble dish

2 oz each wasabi tobiko and 2 ounces or American sturgeon caviar or substitute tobiko

2 c heavy cream, whipped and set aside

Soy-Lime Syrup (Combine 1 bottle lemon tonic, juice of 1 lime. Mix well.)

Special equipment: four 1-oz (1 ¼-inch ring molds or a sturdy cookie cutter the same size, 2 oz

Assembly:

Spray the insides of four 1-oz (1 ¼-inch ring molds with nonstick cooking spray.

Layer the tuna mixture and caviar in the molds as follows: 1/3 of tuna, ½ of tobiko, 1/3 of tuna, ½ of sturgeon caviar.

Press down lightly on the parfait after each layer with the bottom of a Tabasco bottle or the back end of a whisk.

Top the layers with a thin layer of the cream, smooth to cover, and mound cream dab top onto top of upside-down martini glass.

Garnish each portion with two chives. Drizzle vinaigrette and soy-lime syrup around and serve with dominoes spoons.

Originally published in Blue Ginger, copyright 2009 Ming Tsai.

Sarvida and Marayama of El Buono's Pizza

"Wow!" was the only word I could utter when I saw the glare pizza that covered Binky and Quinee Green's living room table.

Fifteen people had it for lunch and there was still half a pizza left. But by all means a pizza in Asia. But he says the dilemma is how to get the pizzas to do through a standard residential front door.

For deliveries call 5338818; for franchise inquiries call 0918-9089094.

My new class schedules are out. Gourmet Doctors Series for beginners and household cooking is ongoing, one series on the how's and Why's of Cooking for Beginners is about to start.

Dr. Francis Bonalos and I are doing "The Well-Nourished Child Series: A Behavioral and Nutritional Approach to Real-Life Childhood Food Issues" on May 23. I am conducting "Food and History Trip Back in Time to Yul, the Grand Lady of Batangas" with heritage preservation advocate Bindu Bose-Aragon.

For inquiries, Call Jane at 9209295 / 9273008, or Jhun at 8474744 / 0908-2272846.

E-mail the author at rap@inquirer.com.ph.

SARVIDA and Marayama

Iloilo's prized fish and specialties

"WHERE ARE WE EATING LUNCH?" It can be such an ordinary question but on the way to Iloilo, it becomes more than that. There are so many choices in this Panay province, all of them so good that one's imagination travels that long distance.

My host, Ike Robinson-Mull prompted me that we were going to Iloilo. Actually, it remained unconfirmed. Ede in the metro Raymundo Robles said that the marugat (mangrove jack) was considered a pest because it ate lapu-lapu, fingerlings, fish thrives, working there as a marine biologist with Bombo Radlett Foundation Fisheries Development Center), said he liked the taste and texture of the marugat and encouraged fish farms to cultivate it. The meat's milky quality, whether cooked as sinigang or grilled, has made it the prized fish it is today.

The marugat was quite fatty and everything we ate was fat, actually. The endless huge dinner had the fat blown like a balloon. And time the

Country Cooking

Madge Inocio

diner or angel wing clam had more meat and a lot more fat. At least I know now when the season is fatty shellfish is in its ebb. When I arrive each before, everyone would answer this and that month. I never suspected it to be in the summer.

There was so much food on the table: boiled shrimp, crabs, grilled pork and adlao rice, crab fat cooked into rice.

Competition

After that much good food, we wanted now how we could possibly still taste all the dishes. 14 in all, that was slated for us at a culinary competition at the mall. There were seven teams, each team composed of two members cooking two dishes, one Ilonggo and one Kontiki. When we arrived, the dishes were nearly done and it was time to taste the cooking. Some of the classic Ilonggo dishes included frozen or steamed chicken in banana parcels, inubo-lubyo (egg in chili) and chicken inasal.

The First Prize winners, Jun Bolito and Benedicto Bendaño, showed how traditional and trendy can be combined effortlessly. They presented chicken inasal wrapping and pomelo tamales served with pesto and tocino on the side. I can't see the fillet superlover of breakfasts, but the judges—Margarita Fores, Gemelle Hispe and myself—looked for the proper flavors and they were all there, the presentation enhanced rather than distracted.

Deco's 'batchoy'

Before going off on another eating appointment, Margarita wanted to treat the American to Deco's. The place is an institution but it's one has a new look since Mang Deco, the chicken mami and bihod company acquired it. Hon Margarita ran out on us to spend time in a big bowl after all that to be usual me. I couldn't even finish my small ordinary order.

It would have been great to visit Deco's, another institution. I missed her the smell has to have sweet grilled native chicken stuffed with lemon grass and tamarind hints, the smoked Iloilong. Most of all, I missed her Honorable Regino, the owner whose nickname is the namesake name. He was a cook who opened Deco's by the sea in the 1970s with some more tables. Success can be measured by how the place is now. It has grown to about 70 tables with air-conditioned rooms for conferences, plus a kitchen appended with stainless steel amenities.

Paulyn Gerochi, featuring owner of several restaurants in Iloilo, hosted us for a weekend, as we Cebus before the other members of the group flew back to Manila. She ordered specialties of other places, good empanadas and dehingka. But she also let us taste the super-thin crisp pizza she serves. I stayed on to have the next morning. At least I had time to catch up with my Iloilo sources who have become my friends.

For great breakfast and lunches, you may patronize Mahu, a perfect dish to end the day.

Just before leaving for the airport, I paused by for my order of fresh tanguile (fish) and empanada. My boots were no more with Pasalubong de Iloilo but with Dr. Gonzalo Jalapitan. Paulyn also gave me her cookies as well. Nothing like getting the best from the place and eating/new people or home enjoy the meal during.

Email: pinoyfood04@yahoo.com

Fried duck in ginger and garlic, fish with 'sampaloc' candy sauce, noodles with spare ribs

QUIET DINER SPENT THE LAST FOUR nights to what could be called the conservative restaurants, where the economics of eating out would not actually deal the price—so much. Not quite mass, but dining in these places gives as much satisfaction in terms of food and ambiance.

Zong Chinese restaurant (633-2072) Arranged in the style at the Fort Point building, Fort Bonifacio Plaza, Fort Bonifacio, Global City, where the lingerie of some giant conglomerate were once sporting up for tables. It's also in the Alabang Town Center and Tiendesitas.

Hydrogen-a dispersion from the usual red-and-black menus of traditional Chinese restaurants, designed by young professionals influenced by modern architecture. Colors are minimal: off-white and yellow. Benches are steel instead of chairs, and tables are not the usual round with lazy Susan on top. It is airy and bright.

Staff-Attentive, in spite of what it shows a full house. Reservations are checked carefully. They are sent. They can suggest a whole menu.

Service-Fast and efficient.

Suggested menu: A fixed menu is readily available for those who call. It would be practical to come in groups of at least four or six. Tong does not use MSG. Four suits Combination **Beef Pinoy Platter**, steamed lapu-lapu and sweet plus spring rolls. Soup, to us, was not quite necessary but for those who want it, there is a good selection. Concentrate, three main courses would be enough—**Braised Fish Fillet with Mushrooms and Tofu**, **Gourmet Beef Chicken** (a bit sweet) and **Fried Duck in Ginger and Garlic**. Noodles to say, include with the **E Fu Noodles** (actually a bit plain for me) and **Sang Chow Fried Noodles**. Give the meat a healthy element and get **Stewed Broccoli with Garlic**. Choose either **Mango Sago Cream** or **Banana Fritters with Honey Glaze**. Your tab will not be more than P600 per.

Usual service and government charges are imposed. Diners credit are honored.

Rating - ★★★

Bangin-Ih Bistro, Bonifacio. This is a franchisee of the main establishment, located inside the Fregata Mall, in the center of the subdivision.

Design area-At night, it is illuminated to no younger hue, specially the ceiling, which has the likeness of square shapes done in dark. Dishes and chairs are somewhat dim. Atmosphere is comparatively good.

Staff-Customers are greeted at the entrance, noted quickly and given the menu immediately. They show an apparent willingness to please the diner.

Service-Quick and efficient. Ask for whatever, like soda, water) and it will be given.

Suggested menu: Choose from the **Fried Spected with Sampaloc candy sauce with Crispy Kangkong** get our vote, for those we diners, a **Lucalingan sa Bangka** we could at P880 is offered. This includes **Edamame**, **Inihaw na Baboy**, **Kare-kareng Bangus with Ginataan at Bayas Blanca**, **Kalamay Tamnan** is a family meal at P1,020+4.

Service-we gave diners-costs, charges are the usual.

Rating - ★★★

Author: Diner-at-Large, Food Court, Promenade, Greenhills Commercial Complex, San Juan (799-3841). Because this is located along the "Circle" diners can circumvent, moving from this can to make, anchor, but take-wings and thousands.

Dining area-Common to all the eateries around. But come early or you get the table near the restaurants. Tables are the usual ones found in mass market dining places.

Staff-Discourtesy or other of the eateries pay and wait at your tables. Staff who bring the orders are courteous.

Service-Standard type

Suggested menu-You can get a combination basket of **dim sum** and **siopao**. The pan-fried **Xiao Long Bao** is quite good. **Pork sibog, stubbs Fried rice** is delicious, plus **Noodles in Garlic with Spare Ribs**. Try **Stir-fried Beef with Oyster Sauce**. That would be a very filling meal and the tab will be very reasonable.

Senior cards are honored. Usual government charges are imposed.

Rating - ★★★

The Quiet Diner

Resto at a Glance

Eating Index

Poor

Good

Excellent

What's on the Menu?

Make your customer crave your words

Chef Marvin Katigbong's extensive hotel experience in prestigious establishments such as the Mandarin Oriental Manila and Dusit Hotel Nikko Bangkok have honed his culinary talent and passion for good food that can make a difference in your event. At Culinary Fundamentals I, Asian Chef for Culinary Applications, Chef Marvin has developed a keen flair for what makes a menu successful and shares some insight into the importance of menu development.

In today's competitive business environment, it is not enough to be able to offer an menu that pleases the palate's taste buds. Any food-type titles's can produce both. Menu is the food you serve. Dining is not the particular room you should offer besides knowing your market's taste preferences and your establishment's here. As ill prepared menu offering does not get your customers over it is the food you serve. Dining is not the particular room you should offer besides knowing your market's taste preferences and your establishment's here. As ill prepared menu offering does not get your customers over it is the food you serve. Dining is not the particular room you should offer besides knowing your market's taste preferences and your establishment's here. As ill prepared menu offering does not get your customers over it is the food you serve.

"Your menu offering should reflect the quest of your food business, as translated into the dishes you serve. Moreover, your menu must be easy to read, to use and balanced, so your food cost without sacrificing the flavors that make your food appealing," he says.

The right menu focuses on getting down to what your customers want and how to deliver that promise of satisfaction that will keep them coming back for more. CONSTANT MENU DEVELOPMENT helps you stay ahead by introducing your customers to new dishes that will keep them coming back for more. Any menu is not complete without the right mix of complement with familiar and even surprising your customer's interesting demands for varying dishes.

The menu must also incorporate seasonal specials, innovative research, and development. It has become par for many operations to have a consistent offer (no proper dishes) is specialized by the owners and refined to appeal to. These are ways to promote trendy-flavored menu and keep your customers coming. The process can be lengthy and can sometimes yield unsatisfying results.

Ruby Haron, founder and President of the Rosenberg Haron's Catering, agrees that the right menu is essential to their continued success with clients. "Customers should get what they pay for. My company is really my food. Every day clients say that they don't need to get salt and pepper since our dishes are prepared very well.

But as Haron herself has discovered, having reliable food partners helped her tremendously with R&D and menu

system. "Not everybody knows this, but Culinary Fundamentals (CFI) has been very supportive in that aspect. Since they have a bank of chefs with different backgrounds, we can always ask them to assist in developing new dishes we want to incorporate into our repertoire. There is a full force of kitchen superstars that we can avail of."

Compared to the exposure of a consultant, Haron credits CFI for its ability to better cater which updating her dishes. "In our offerings they helped us develop our salads, soups and sauce lines as well as appetizers. During the presentations, the chef prepares the dishes which we then subject to our approval. The experience being a chef it has to offer something different which simultaneously our taste profile. Sometimes, we trust the recipes a lot better standardizing it for our use."

Haron continues to join one of the main sessions CFI offers on culinary passions with recipe standardization and kitchen training part of the package. Remember, the right menu can propel you to long lasting food success so it is important to make the best choice from the options before you.

Be prepared to satisfy your customer's food needs. Find a culinary partner who can give you any further offering solutions fit to your specific needs. See the difference that a trained menu can do with the Consultants helping you every step of the way.

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'Bagnet' with 'bagoong' relish

D.I.Y.

Tips

- To make sure the boiled pork is completely dry, pat with paper towels before frying.
- The oil should be very hot when you put the pork in. Use long tongs so you're not too near the pan because the oil will splatter.
- It does not you can serve the bagnet with vinegar dip. For those who want a sweet dip, serve with ketchup sauce.

Text and photos
by Norma Chikiamco
Contributor

CHEF PETER SIU RODRIGUEZ guesses his own idea. He senses his own flair. He makes his own bagoong. He even has his own herd of cows. And he runs his own restaurant, Sisters Garden, in his old hometown of Cavalon, Davao Sur. After years of studying in Les Roches in Switzerland and the Culinary Institute of America in New York, he has chosen to return to his roots to set up shop.

A perfectionist to the core, chef Siu uses his senses to work only with ingredients he knows are the best and the freshest, even if he's cooking just a simple dish of disregarding or scrambles. Thus, his obsessions to planting and harvesting, aquaculture and pastoralists, and fermentation of a silvery gray variety of *Bilis* (but magically transforms into possibly the best fish bagoong ever has ever tasted. This bagoong has no pungent odor, tastes clean and is so concentrated that just a few drops will do.

"The kind of *Bilis* I use for the bagoong is available only from September to December," he says. "When the boat comes in store, I go there myself to buy from the fishermen." Because the tiny fish are so delicate, he allows only one person to handle them.

In processing the bagoong, chef Siu makes it a point not to wash the fish so as not to remove the freshness and flavor that they've imbibed from the sea. In fact, not a single drop of fresh water, not even tap water, is allowed to touch them. "The minute one drop of water touches the fish, the flavor of the bagoong will be off," he says.

In between the fish, he uses flavor salt, which has no additives. Fermentation can take as long as six months, he says, or about seventeen to fifteen days. This carefully and lovingly handled, a bottle of this special bagoong has a shelf life of up to four years.

This meticulousness over a single ingredient is understandable when one considers that bagoong is the foundation for many Bicolano dishes. *Dinengdeng* and *pinakbet*, for instance, two classic Bicolano vegetable stews, rely heavily on bagoong for flavor.

At the InterContinental Manila, where chef Siu is guest chef for the Bicolano Food Festival, the bagoong is also used in crispy pork belly is served not just with the traditional *sukang* Bicol but also with a piquant relish, made of sautéed onions, garlic and tomatoes flavored with chef Siu's bagoong mixed with calamansi. Diners dishes on the tasting menu include lean meat stuffed with *sotobowayan* (an edible native carrot), Vigan empanadas, radish pod salad, *pipian* (chicken dish of Ilocanos set-

gan), home-base dish of pork tenderloin, heart and liver) and shallot-leek, an a la minute dish of beef tenderloin, marrow, livers and tripe.

For the first day of the festival, chef Siu went slaughtered one of his own cows to make empanadas, a tasty dish made with beef and home seasoning, similar to *bulalo*. He also brought several bottles of his very special bagoong, which is on sale in Café Isaiyaw during the festival. (The Davao food festival runs until May 31. Call 7937000.)

Here's a recipe for bagnet as well as for the bagoong relish.

Bagnet with Bagoong Relish

1 whole boneless pork belly with skin on (about 1 kilo), cut into 3 large pieces
12-15 c water
4-5 c cooking oil
For the bagoong relish
2 tbsp cooking oil
1 onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic
2 tomatoes, sliced
2 tbsp bagoong isda
Calamansi juice, to taste

Put pork belly in a large, deep stockpot and pour in enough water to completely cover the pork. Bring to a boil then lower heat to simmer. Let simmer until pork is tender.

REMOVE pork from water and hang or let rest on a rack until completely dry. In a wok, heat oil to medium heat then, using long kitchen tongs, fry the pork belly, skin side down. Immediately cover the pan because the oil will splatter.

When pork browns, remove from heat then transfer to a rack to drain. Let cool completely.

Fry the pork a second time. Before cooking oil then fry the pork until the skin blisters and small bubbles appear on the skin's surface. Remove from wok then let cool slightly before slicing into serving pieces.

Prepare the bagoong relish.

Heat oil and sauté onion for one to two minutes. Add garlic and tomatoes and continue sautéing until tender. Combine bagoong isda with calamansi juice into tomato mixture. Serve with bagnet.

What to do with leftover 'bagnet'

Bagnet is too good to be relegated to the leftover bin after the first serving. While undoubtedly it is tasty (not only is it pork, it's also fried twice), it's all right to have it if eaten in moderation and only as an occasional treat. Here are other ways you can use leftover bagnet.

- Chop bagnet into smaller pieces and use as *sahog* for *pinakbet*.
- You can also add chopped bagnet to adobong kangkong.
- Top fresh green or oregon with finely sliced bagnet.
- Add chopped bagnet to tomato and red egg salad. Combine two medium-size chopped tomatoes with one to two sliced red eggs. Toss with chopped bagnet.
- Use chopped bagnet as topping for mango-mango.
- Include bite-size pieces of bagnet in the filling for fresh lumpia.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

LIFESTYLE Food

Amid flu scare in HK, Pinoy chefs excel

CHEF Erika de Leon of the Center for Culinary Arts Manila receives a medal and certificate from head judge Mario Bruno Iavello.

Manila chefs and students amass medals and certificates at the Hofex '09 food meet

By Pangie Baga-Reyes

REGION'S winning dish: Portobello Mushrooms in Espresso and Thyme Reduction, Crushed Pharaonic Nuts Infusion on a bed of Saffron Couscous

A HUGE CELEBRATION marked the release from eight-day quarantine of some 300 guests and staffers from Metropark Hotel in Wan Chai, Hong Kong. They were finally declared flu free.

But another unprecedented celebration by Filipino chefs ended the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, known to few blocks away from the hotel.

Yes, amid the jubilation over in HK, Pinoy chefs and culinary student assistants from the Center for Culinary Arts Manila were on to compete for the country and ultimately amassed medals and certificates at the 18th Asian International Exhibition of

AMID El-

GARFIELD By Jim Davis

A. LIPIN By JOEL ABRERA

FUGAO BABOY By BVL JUNIOR

DICK TRACY

LOVEHUNGTE By ELIZABETH CHOMICKO

JAMES BOND

DIVINE COMEDY By ETHAN PABALINAS

BABY BLUES By JERRY SCOTT

TULOOK By MARIA COLL

SEN By DANIEL SHELTON

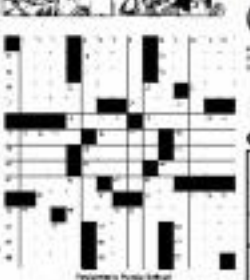
ATCHO AND WEEDY By LISA GARCELLANO

HOROSCOPE

By FRANCIS DRAKE

BEKO MACHINE By PANXO ABRERA

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



CONCEPTIS SU DOKU

Conceptis Sudoku

			2			1		
		7			1			9
	9	5				4		
				8			2	
5			7		4			3
	8			9				
		4				8	5	
2			6			1		
	5			3				

HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.
Tips and program at www.sudoku.com

Answer to previous puzzle

8	6	2	1	5	3	7	4	9
7	1	5	4	9	8	3	2	6
3	9	4	6	2	7	5	1	8
2	8	1	7	6	4	9	3	5
9	7	3	2	1	5	6	8	4
4	5	6	8	3	9	1	7	2
1	2	9	5	4	2	8	6	7
5	3	8	3	7	6	4	9	1
6	4	7	9	8	1	2	5	3

Amid flu scare in HK, Pinoy chefs excel

From page D1

Food and Drink, Hotel and Restaurant and Foodservice Equipment, Supplies and Services Exhibition (Hofex 2009).

Erika Tello de Leon bagged the bronze for her Portobello Mushrooms in Balsamic and Thyme Vinaigrette, Curried Preserved Vegetables on a bed of Saffron Couscous, which was under the Vegetarian/Western Cold Platter category.

De Leon's mushroom recipe was a perfect mix of Mexican and Middle Eastern influences. It combined the use of exotic spices with traditional staple of couscous and assorted Hispanic ingredients. The cooked tomatoes reduction was placed on a hot plate, topped with the sautéed couscous, covered with a nice mound of curried vegetables, and then crowned with Portobello mushrooms. It was finally garnished with a quenelle of smoked eggplant cream and a gardenia of sweet potato (yam).

De Leon was assisted by CCA student Donald Dionisio.

"It's my first time to compete in a culinary competition such as this," said the eccentric 35-year-old De Leon, who finished her culinary studies at Le Cordon Bleu in Sydney, Australia, before joining the CCA faculty where she teaches a course on soups, stocks and sauces and other cooking methods.

Cool and confident

De Leon, who held practices a dozen times prior to competition, was cool and confident before a group of senior judges led by chef Mario Bruno Sarabia of the Thai Swiss Culinary Education Center in Thailand.

"I was confident but nervous at the end. My hands were shaking while putting the carrots. And, the oven was too hot. I had to adjust it before the mushrooms get burnt," recounted De Leon, who roasted green onion while every time a judge would check her workplace.

All participants were to prepare and present their dishes within 60 minutes, one main course for four persons. De Leon finished hers at 52 minutes.

They were further judged according to the handling and arrangement of their ingredients and tools, appropriate work and cooking methods, and taste.

De Leon bested other chefs from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Modern Chinese cuisine

The biennial culinary event also saw another Pinoy entry under the Modern Chinese Cuisine Hot Cooking Challenge.

CCA chef Rodrigo Reloj, assisted by Jess Galace, presented the three-course Chicken Symbols in Abalone Sauce for a group of judges led by Hong Kong Chui Lit of The Mira Hong Kong.

Though he failed to make it because his designated cooking pan and the induction stove did not heat up right away, thus delaying him so that he were overtime by 12 minutes, Reloj was also cool and confident during the competition.

His dishes probably got votes from a group of Pinoy chefs who flew all the way from Manila to give support to the Philippine team, including chefs Brando Santos and Irene Santos.

Exposure

"It's always been our objective to expose our students and the faculty to various culinary competitions," said Bachir Bitaibol, chief executive officer and general manager of The Learning Group, which includes CCA. "Win or lose, it's part of their continuous learning. You don't just stop after winning gold or losing to someone. The most important thing is that you learn from the experiences."

Proud to be Filipino

Aside from De Leon and Reloj, more Filipinos joined the Hofex competition in various categories and brought home gold, silver and bronze.

Select members of the Pastry Alliance of the Philippines (PAP) competed in the bakery and pastry events. Winners included Buddy Trinidad (Live Bakery, Dessert); Perman Tolentino (Bakery, Asian Mousses, Sweets); Dick Ching (Sugar Showpiece, Sweets); Mel Arnaiz Un Carving, silver); Kim Naval Ondoy (3D plated dessert, Sweets); Ric Lingad (Live Bakery team, gold); Rod Vargas (Live Bakery team, gold); Charlene Ngo (Live Bakery team, gold); Carol Lanto (wedding cake); and Martha Ibay Ellis (Plated Dessert, Bakery Table).

PAP support team included James Aurelio, Peter Sevilla-Santos, Peachy Jabat, Jackie Ang-Po, Alma Cal and Sonny Montano.

This was the first time the newly organized PAP had joined an international competition.

"Pinoy's] na-cite finally timeand a common goal of giving an excellent impression to the rest of Asia that the Filipinos have very talented, hard-working and competitive pastry chefs, we felt we have achieved that," said Sevilla-Santos. "Their support gave a boost as a head to the team. Everyone was not equal, a support team and a friend to one another. Everywhere we went to the competition our presence was felt because of our camaraderie team spirit and love of country. We were very proud to represent the Philippines in the pastry competition, waving our flag up high with pride and dignity."

Members of the Les Toques Blanches de ECHE also brought home the bacon. Chef Carlo Miguel of Isla Restaurant won a bronze and a silver for the Between Cuisine Category-Norwegian Herring Dish and Modern Cuisine Category-Pork Shoulder Butt Dish, respectively.

The Gourmet Team Challenge, composed of Ariel Manuel, Fernando Aroxcana, Margo Villena, Andy Tabombo, Pauline Lagdameo and Rolando Cruz-Lorias, got the silver award, with the support of David Uy, Mark Lennon, Nana Nadal and Mike Aguas. The team was under the supervision of J Gamboa, CEC director, and Deb. cusa Frei, CEC president.

Here's the winning recipe of chef Erika de Leon.

Portobello Mushrooms in Balsamic and Thyme Vinaigrette, Curried Preserved Vegetables on a bed of Saffron Couscous, served with Quenelle of Eggplant Cream and Sundried Tomato Coulis

Balsamic Mushrooms:

4 pc Portobello mushrooms, caps (about 4-4 1/2" in diameter), approximately 250 grams
60 ml extra virgin olive oil
30 ml balsamic vinegar
8 g minced garlic
5 sprigs fresh thyme, stalks removed
salt and cracked black pepper, to season

Curried Preserved vegetables:
150 g red and yellow bell peppers, fine julienned
80 g zucchini, fine julienned
150 g diced tomato
50 g spinach leaves
1 /2 tsp curry powder
vegetable stock
salt and pepper

Couscous:
120 g medium grained couscous
200 ml vegetable stock
A pinch saffron threads
½ tsp ground cumin
1/8 tsp ground ginger
1 small piece cinnamon bark
A pinch ground allspice
15 g chopped pistachios
25 g dried cranberries
20 ml lemon juice
salt and black pepper
Eggplant cream:
1 pc Japanese eggplant, skin blackened and peeled
100 g feta cheese
3 g minced garlic
lemon
salt and pepper
Olive oil
Sundried Tomato Coulis:
50 g sundried tomatoes
50 ml cooked tomatoes
60 g minced onions
20 ml olive oil

PAP/TNT Alliance of the Philippines winning team James Antolin, Bunjy Bautista, Martha Ibay, Aries Mendoza, Pete Ching, Mel Arnaiz, Kim Naval Card Lanto, Ric Lingad, Rod Vargas, Charlene Ngo, Faia Sevilla-Santos, Peachy Jabat, Jackie Ang-Po, Alma Cal and Sonny Montano

100 ml blood orange juice
3 g potato starch
3 g ground cumin
salt and pepper
Garnish: fried snow peas, gardenia and olive oil

For the mushrooms: Remove stalks and gills from Portobello mushrooms. Combine balsamic vinegar, thyme, extra virgin olive oil, salt and pepper to make vinaigrette. Marinate mushrooms for 30-35 minutes. In a hot sauté pan, sear one side of the mushrooms briefly. Turn it over and place in a moderately hot oven for 3-4 minutes.

For the Curried Preserved Vegetables: Cut bell peppers in fine julienne. Use a turning slicer to make ribbons out of carrots and zucchini. Boil slice onions and chiffonade spinach as well. Sauté in olive oil until tender. Add curry vegetable stock to cook vegetables. Season with curry powder, salt and pepper.

For Sundried Tomato Coulis: Puree ingredients until soft. Add tomato puree and chopped sundried tomatoes. Simmer for 5 minutes. Transfer to a food processor and make a puree. Return to saucepan and add blood orange juice, potato starch and season with ground cumin, salt and pepper. Simmer until coulis slightly thickens.

Smoked Eggplant Cream: Puree the eggplant all over and grill over open flame until the skin blackens and vegetable softens. Remove from flame and cool slightly. Remove flesh of eggplant and discard blackened skin. Add feta cheese, garlic, olive oil, salt and pepper. Mix well and chill or firm up.

Couscous: Combine vegetable stock, spices, saffron and salt in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Remove from heat and toss in couscous. Allow to sit for 3-4 minutes. Add lemon juice, chopped pistachios and dried cranberries. Season with salt and pepper.

To serve: Mold couscous into square (or even round) shapes. Spoon sundried tomato coulis onto hot plate. Place sautéed couscous on top of the sauce. Make a nice mound of curried vegetables then top with sautéed Portobello mushrooms. Garnish with a quenelle of Smoked Eggplant cream and a gardenia of sweet potato (yam).

Yield: 4 servings

DE LEON with CCA-Manila support team (from left) Anne Palmares, Lilibeth Camposano, Dennis Dimaano, Jasper Gutierrez, chef Rodrigo Reloj and Jun Sabino

LTB Philippines winning team: Fernando Aroxcana, Pauline Lagdameo, Andy Tabombo, David Uy, Margo Villena, Baldomero Cruz-Lorias, Mark Lenaco and Ariel Manuel

Get the Wolverine collectible bucket at Jollibee

Catch the X-Men fever at Jollibee as it offers yet another exciting promotion that will whet your appetite for one of this year's most awaited movies. Coming soon to Jollibee stores near you is the limited edition Wolverine Chickenjoy Bucket design, just in time for the opening of what is expected to be this summer's biggest blockbuster, X-Men Origins: Wolverine.

The collectible Wolverine Chickenjoy bucket features the popular Marvel comic book character as portrayed by Hugh Jackman in the upcoming movie, which will be released in theaters on April 30. With Jollibee's latest offering, fans of all ages of the gruff, cigar-chomping superhero can take home a piece of the action and savor six pieces of the crispy-delicious, juicylicious, scrumptious-delicious and gravylicious Chickenjoy, for only P260 per bucket.

Get yours now as the limited edition Chickenjoy Wolverine Bucket will only be available in Jollibee stores until May 23, or until supplies last. The Chickenjoy bucket meal is also available for take-out, drive thru and delivery.

GLAZED Apple Tart with Cinnamon and Ice Cream

GRILLED Norwegian Salmon with Horseradish Caviar and Beetroot Vinaigrette

Old gang is deliciously back

Grassi's, the top European resto of the 1990s, is back with more of the same plus innovations

By Alex T. Vergara

SLOW-COOKED Lamb Shank Moroccan-style with Vegetable Couscous

GRASSI'S, THE EUROpean restaurant that once elevated fine dining to an iconic level in the '90s, is back. And this time, under the same husband-and-wife team of Boni and Marina Grassi, it caters to a bigger clientele of mall-goers at Alabang Town Center (ATC).

Food aficionados, of course, remember Grassi's for its superb food and impeccable service when it first opened its doors in 1993 on the fifth floor of Rockwell Building in Pasig. Despite its secluded location, people from all over the metro lapped on it for its famous Seafood Crabmeat Lobster Bisque.

"Imagine, you had to drive all the way to Rockwell and when you get there, we didn't even have noticeable signage," says Marina, daughter of the late industrialist and media mogul Eugenio "Geny" Lopez Jr. "Yet, people came. Soon enough, it became a destination place."

With the country's economy then on the verge of taking off under the Ramos administration, it was a bonanza time as people were in a spending mood. Grassi's gladly indulged them by offering the finest imported beef, wines and seafood.

But that soon changed, recalls Marina, with the peso devaluation. "It made matters worse... the Asian financial crisis that followed soon after slashed valuations hence the Philippines had of becoming the next Asian tiger.

"When the exchange rate was almost P56 to $1, it became extremely difficult for us to maintain operations," she says. "Events beyond our control forced us to take a different course."

Grassi's, in the wake of the economic crisis, soon reinvented itself as a café when it moved to Rockwell in the late '90s until it closed in 2005.

Old and new

When it reopened at ATC on Labor Day, the couple soon again had to tweak the restaurant's concept without allowing the quality of food and service to suffer in order to appeal to a generally younger, more budget-conscious clientele.

"Our old customers are delighted to find out that we've reopened," says Marina. "But there's a difference between the old Grassi's and this one. This isn't a fine-dining restaurant, but more of a café that's specializing in seafood."

Apart from certain signature dishes like the Soft-shell Crabs, Grassi's, led by executive chef Raoul Villaver, an old hand from the restaurant's Rockwell days, offers a mix of old and new items.

The list of classics includes Ensalada Salad with Pan-fried Scallops and Goat Cheese, Pumpkin Soup with Sun-dried Tomatoes, Slow-cooked Lamb Shank Marrakesh-style with Vegetable Couscous, and Sautéed Cream Dory Fillet with Lemon Butter Caper Sauce.

As the same time, Grassi's has beefed up its menu with new offerings such as Fried Prawn-Mango Salad in Shells with Wasabi Aioli Sauce, Baked Oyster Stockfeldter with Spinach, Grilled Norwegian Salmon with Horseradish Crust and Beetroot Vinaigrette and Braised Ox Tongue in Mushroom, Caper Beurre Blanc, among others.

Providing the total food concept is a long list of pasta and risotto dishes, which include Basil Risotto with Sautéed Mushrooms and Chorizo, Crabmeat Lasagna with Grilled Prawns on Basil Chardonnay Sauce, Spaghetti in Chardonnay Cream Sauce with Salmon and Leeks and Bucatini with Bolognese and Basil Sauce.

Prices, ranging from P140 (Pumpkin Soup with Sun-dried Tomatoes) to P450 (Slow-cooked Lamb Shank), are unbelievably low than their range from P270 to P280, while main courses can set you back by P270 to P310.

There's a "science" to providing diners with value for their money. And the couple, together with their veteran team, seems to have mastered it.

"I want to get things humming by attracting all these people in," says Boni, a graduate of a hotel and restaurant school in Switzerland and former GM of a five-star hotel. "I don't want to charge people an arm and a leg. As long as the place is full and turnover is high, we're fine."

One of the first things Boni did when they finally decided to reopen Grassi's was to get some of the old boys back. He needed them, he says, if they were to come prepared on Day One.

He called Villaver, who, in turn, notified his colleagues from the old Grassi's, including waiters, if they wanted to rejoin the team.

"They know my standards and how demanding I am," says Boni. "We almost everybody came from all of them know each other; it was like one big barkadahan in a sense."

It doesn't hurt that Grassi's investors, as Boni describes it, is "yes-and-gang" feel as warm aficionados, such as the wooden floor and brick wall with mirror accents, and an ideal fods in the seemingly cold components such as the concrete floor and table arrangements.

"We have Luigi Bonis and Corey Loyes of 3 Artichokes to thank for Grassi's new look," says Marina. "It's elegant yet inviting, chic yet casual enough to appeal to both our old and new clientele."

ARUGULA Salad with Pan-fried Scallops and Green Papaya

THE GRASSI couple tapped Luigi Bioni and Corey Loyes of 3 Artichokes to do the interiors.

Editor Bonnie G. Velarde
ENTERTAINMENT

SUMMER BREAK
Lovebirds Iya Villania and Drew Arellano light up everyone's smile waiting at the Caticlan airport for their plane ride back to Manila on Sunday—by reviewing their first-ever underwater recipes.

What's cooking, David?

Reigning American Idol says he still gets the jitters

"A LOT OF THINGS, BUT PROBABLY NOT a lot of dancing," quipping "American Idol" David Cook told the hundreds who asked what to expect from his Manila gig—with Season 7 (2008) runner-up David Archuleta. The two Davids will perform in a back-to-back concert on May 16 at the SM Mall of Asia concert grounds in Pasay.

"Fans can expect a lot of fun. Archie and I are very excited to perform for the people of the Philippines," said the 26-year-old singer-songwriter in an e-mail interview.

Nearly a year after winning the title, Cook said he still experiences "a small amount of stage fright" when performing before a crowd. He revealed a ritual prior to going onstage that helps him loosen up.

"My and the band put our hands in the middle and say something stupid. Up to us earlier what I want to do on stage. My worst shows are like ones where I have an down time prior."

Below are excerpts from the interview:

Why didn't you include any song from your radio album 'Analog Heart' in your set list/main album?

While I greatly appreciate what we were able to do on "Analog Heart," I wanted my major label debut to be about looking forward and not back.

How different is 'Analog Heart' from your self-titled major/mass album?

The new record shows a definite progression. I am writing about different things [but the core value is consistent on both.

You are being compared to Season 8 Final Runner-up Chris Daughtry.

I have a great amount of respect for what Daughtry has accomplished, so if people want to compare us, I'm OK with that.

You're a self-proclaimed "record nerd." Do you still find time for unconventional places to buy records?

Yes, but most of [which] I buy anything that now online is considered unclassic.

AMERICAN Idols' 2008 David Cook, right, and runner-up David Archuleta are in Manila for tomorrow's concert on Saturday at Mall of Asia.

Censors: Ad bends truth

By Marinel R. Cruz

"A DISTORTION OF THE TRUTH" was how the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board described on Tuesday a TV commercial showing a child spelling the word "no-nutritious" as "L-O-C"— the name of a delivery van selling ice cream.

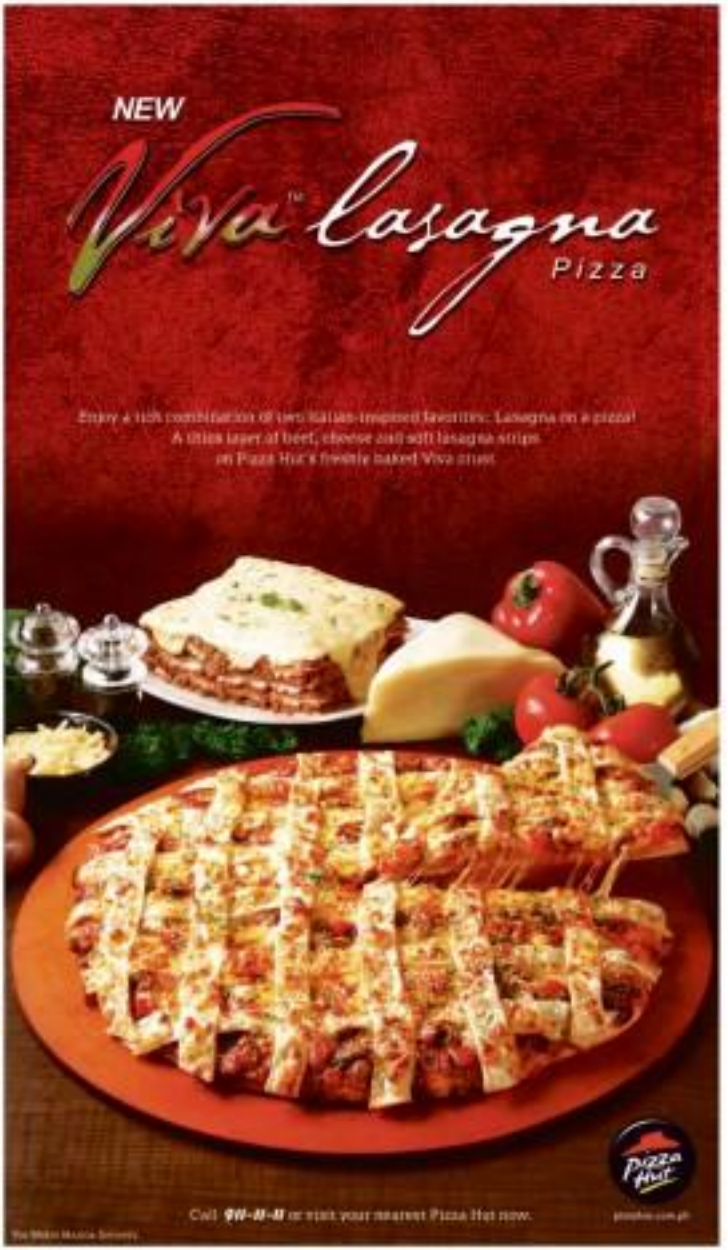
"The commercials, without the guidance of an adult, [that] presents an interpretation of digestion," Censor chair Marissa Lagsanilla said in a letter she sent to Supreme Medias A. chair/CAd Standards Council Inc. and Herman Basbaño, president of the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas.

Lagsanilla said the board received several complaints about the advertisement, which she believes solve TV host and Optimal Media Board chair Edu Manzano. "The child-ritual was even proclaimed and presented as the truth by [their] host," Lagsanilla pointed out. The setting is a spelling bee and, resorting to the boy's answer, Manzano says, "Tamang!"

Lagsanilla asked Nielsen to take a second look at the ad. "The average child may not have [an] adult's grasp of figures of speech," said Lagsanilla.

Because Entertainment tried to reach Manzano for comment but his mobile phone was either not working, or turned off.

Inquirer earlier reported that a resolution was passed by the members of the Commissioner provincial board calling on the MTRCB and the Department of Education to have the "readership" and "improper" TV adjusted out.



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GREENBELT 3

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AYALA CENTER CEBU

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May 10-17, 11am, 4pm & 8pm | Activity Center

GREENBELT

Hi-5 Live at Greenbelt!
May 19, 10am, 4pm & 8pm | Greenbelt 1 Park

ALABANG TOWN CENTER

Summer Workshops
April 17-May 29 (F), 9:30am, Mall Zone

AYALA CENTER CEBU

The Hi-5 Crazy Live at Ayala Center Cebu!
May 27, 2pm | Activity Center

MARKET! MARKET!

Power Mity Run Year 2 | Rally your Brats, Join the Power Mity Run Year 2!
May 17, Market! Market! | Activity Gateway

BONIFACIO HIGH STREET

Live Cooking with Margarita Forés
May 14, 2pm | Activity Area (near Starbucks)

TRINOMA

Hi-5 Live at Trinoma!
May 13, 14, 15, 1pm | Activity Center

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1 X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
2 17 AGAIN
3 THE HAUNTING IN CONNECTICUT
4 IP MAN
5 BFF
6 STAR TREK
7 X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
8 DED NA SI LOLO
9 HEAVENLY TOUCH
10 GHOSTS OF GIRLFRIENDS PAST

ERMITA

1 AMUSEMENT
2 X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
3 STAR TREK
4 IP MAN
5 GHOSTS OF GIRLFRIENDS PAST
6 DED NA SI LOLO
7 BFF

METRO EAST

1 IP MAN
2 X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
3 BFF
4 STAR TREK
5 THE HAUNTING IN CONNECTICUT
6 GHOSTS OF GIRLFRIENDS PAST
7 BFF
8 DED NA SI LOLO

NOVALICHES

1 X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
2 STAR TREK
3 BFF
4 HEAVENLY TOUCH

PIONEER

1 AMUSEMENT
2 GHOSTS OF GIRLFRIENDS PAST
3 X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
4 STAR TREK

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Ded na si Lolo
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STA. ROSA

1 STAR TREK
2 BFF
3 SUPER TYPHOON
4 FRIDAY THE 13TH

LIPA

1 X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
2 BFF
3 THE HAUNTING IN CONNECTICUT
4 SUPER TYPHOON

DASMARINAS

1 X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
2 STAR TREK
3 THE UNICORN
4 BFF

IMUS

1 BFF
2 IP MAN
3 STAR TREK
4 X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE

ANGELES

1 X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
2 BFF
3 SUPER TYPHOON
4 STAR TREK

STARMILLS

1 X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
2 STAR TREK
3 BFF
4 BFF
5 SUPER TYPHOON
6 CRANK 2

BACOLOD

1 X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
2 HE'S JUST NOT THAT INTO YOU
3 BFF
4 CRANK 2
5 HEAVENLY TOUCH
6 FAST & FURIOUS 4

ILOILO

1 STAR TREK
2 CRANK 2
3 17 AGAIN
4 X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
5 BFF
6 HEAVENLY TOUCH

OPENS TOMORROW

MOVIEWORLD

E3

Wanted:

By Rayzel Sun Diego Jr.

IT'S A DONE DEAL, FOR
Dawes at least. On TEDF
it was officially announced
would play the lead role of
local version of the popula
ch "Stairway to Heaven,"
n Rushes that same day.

Dawes, however, told Ba
tainment that his Chela fan
leading lady—yes," he said.

Early reports point to Jenn
do or Nina's Evangelista. Dav
al partner Marian Rivera in

BUT WHO'S THAT G
Pole-Vaulting checks out (h
turning the ball during a re
"Wanna Fly Beach Volleyba
Barangay bar tournament. Alt
actor is spotted strolling a
hand with accommodating
whom he's keeping close t

The comp

"Clown Kid," said "Boga
a few trailers on TV, pl
send a few reviews, all
conscience call myself a
ews. I did snatch a few
ies and watched one or
stressed after the series

Let me say this: It isn't

Sis, all the characters yo
from the iconic series are
Speek, Bala, Ulisis, Clarki
Kerubato hit by the meteo
a re-imagining of the "Bu
called it a "re-origin." (Bu
n the series, are would (Cr
figure out for yourself) wh
now "beginning"in those s
mythology, and an alternat
lower).

Dawes's best (but not
is fantastically good-look
played by Zarkers Qui
shortage of slinky alien
ers who sweat to look
original Ms. Speek) to s
when he appeared on our

If you haven't seen th
should I say, boldly?

Finally... To my little g
I on Saturday "Happy B

Leading lady for Dingdong

...because she's doing "Darna."

"I mean, the network will find the right girl," Dantes said. "There are special requirements for the part." He declined to give a personal choice, but revealed that his ultimate fantasy is Hollywood star Kate Beckinsale.

Dantes admits that Chokoi are pretty big shoes to fill — just like Sergio in "Mara Clara."

During his 2005 run on GMA 7, the heartthrob was a sensational top dancer making a household name out of Chokoi, played by Korean actor Ryeowook. He prepare for the part, Dantes is watching DVDs of the original series. "I caught some episodes four years ago, but I'm watching the whole series again," he said.

The biggest challenge, he noted, is adding a Pinoy flavor to the well-loved show. In he presented, since it is also his first soap minus Rivera? "No," he said. I'm more excited than nervous."

As for Rivera, Dantes realized that he'll rather keep "private" whatever there is between them. Suffice it to say that they "still make each other, he said. "I'm already looking forward to our reunion."

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UP 3D
STAR TREK XI 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, 9:30
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The sale goes on till May 17, with selected titles strictly on a first-come, first-served basis.

All items are at give-away prices to start with, and customers get a free CD or DVD (of equal price) for every purchase.

Available are titles in all genres—pop, rock, R&B, soul, new age, classical, electronica, hip-hop and instrumental.

This is the latest in a series of successful CD/DVD sales by the same distributor.

CHEER FACTOR

The complexities of relationships

... as told in song, and a love story from two viewpoints

THE NIGHT BEFORE I HEADED home from Los Angeles, I watched the final dress rehearsal of the newest East West Players' offering, "The Last Five Years" by Jason Robert Brown. It is actually the second in a performances of two-woman musicals, the first being "Many Moons Little," by Stephen Sondheim.

"The Last Five Years" is the story of Cathy, an actress, and Jamie, an author. The musical tracks their relationship in the course of five years, with a little twist: we move forward in time with Jamie after his first date with Cathy, and backward with Cathy from her discovery of a goodbye letter and Jamie's wedding ring. The two stories meet in the middle, on their wedding day.

I had never seen a production of the show (it was staged in Manila a few years ago by Actors' Actors Inc., with Arielle Tesoro as Jamie and Maneka Lauchengco Yulo as Cathy; I can only imagine how electric that run must have been), so the invitation to watch the dress rehearsal was indeed a treat.

Two good friends of mine, Michael K. Lee and Jennifer Paz, play the leads (I have studied with both—with Michael in "They're Playing Our Song" and with Jen in "Flower Drum Song"). Since the rehearsal of the first musical was running late, I went in the upstairs ballet

BACK STORY

Lea Salonga

dressing room and hung out with Mike and Jen.

Once it came time for their rehearsal to begin, I headed downstairs and found myself a comfy seat. I noticed the set was just a framed projection screen and two chairs. At center stage was a grand piano; her musical director Marc Macalinao and another chair for the guitarist.

I'll refrain from saying any more about the show... except that I loved it.

Masterfully directed by Jon Lawrence Rivera, the cute, yuppie-ish... rare tales of the same story... two separate points of view... the giddy anticipation of seeing one another after that first date... a road trip... dealing with distance, jealousy and one another's artistic ups and downs... the joy of an engagement and the wedding day... the challenge of monogamy... and the crushing realization that even with best efforts, the relationship isn't going to work.

This is all staged with stark simplicity, as one's focus is on the two characters as they undergo separate transformations and self-discoveries.

I speak of Michael and Jennifer in a loose, in this is a two-hander and difficult to execute... and they execute it beautifully. Each lends a great deal of sensitivity and empathy to the characters they play. They are each funny, heartbreaking, passionate and wonderful. It was such a thrill to watch them. Kudos, too, to the rest of the creative staff for a job well-done.

I had some trouble with the Arnold cymbals, there were times when I couldn't hear either actor, but that's a technical glitch that is readily remedied in time for paying audiences.

To those of you reading this from Los Angeles, please go see "Many Moons Little/The Last Five Years." It runs until June 27 in East West Players, 120 Judge John Aiso Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012. For tickets and other details, visit http://www.eastwestplayers.org.

To boldly go where no one's gone before

Last weekend, my husband (in my Mother's Day treat) took me to lunch and a movie: "Star Trek," directed by J.J. Abrams (among his long list of credits as writer, producer, composer and director are "Felicity," "Lost," "Alias," "Forever Young," "Mission: Impossible III" and "Cloverfield").

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CHANCE IN LAS VEGAS

Filipino singer Charice Pempengco performs during the "We Are One/Celebrate Freedom/Friends" concert at the Mandalay Bay Events Center in Las Vegas last weekend. Pempengco, a singer recently in Las Vegas who has worked with superstars Bo Collins Glenn, Justin Timberlake and Michael Bublé—had the matchmaker in producing the prestigious Pinoy's first all-original solo CD, recorded in the US and due for release very soon.

Watch the BLOCKBUSTER movies at Ayala Malls Cinemas and get a chance to win exciting BIG prizes!

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FROM THE AUTHOR OF THE DA VINCI CODE

TOM HANKS

ANGELS & DEMONS

OPENS TOMORROW